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A STORY OF THE BLACK HILLS

BY

MRS. GEORGE E. SPENCER

AUTHOR OF "A PLUCKY ONE," "SALT LAKE FRUIT," "THE STORY OF MARY."

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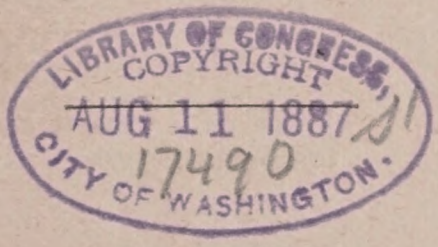

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CALAMITY JANE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS WOOING.

"MARRY me, Meg. What's the use of waiting? If I don't love *you*, I love nothing; and all my gifts, my opportunities, as you call them, will amount to nothing. The money I make I've no desire to keep, since you won't share it. I throw it away—or worse. Now be a sensible girl! Look the matter squarely in the face! If you persist in your refusal, you are not only sacrificing yourself, you are sacrificing me, whom you say you love, and I believe you, Meg, I believe you. It is all very well to consider my uncle's feelings, and his money. But if you think *he* has any feelings, you are very much mistaken. As for affection! There's not a particle of affection in him. It is pride, and obstinacy! Nothing else!"

He had been walking up and down the dingy parlor, making the furniture creak with his long, quick strides, nervously gnawing his mustache, while he pulled in and out of his hand some fresh bills he held.

Now he stopped, folded his arms, looking down at her as, with her back turned to him, she pressed her forehead on the dusty window-pane, hiding from him her tearful face.

He seemed to find sufficient for contemplation in her graceful shoulders and the tawny hair, that

caught all the sunshine in its soft meshes, for he stood without speaking. Yet he had much to say, and plenty of ability to say it. There was no lack of ability about him, nor of fire, as with his deep-set gray eyes fixed upon her, he stood, a tall, lithe young fellow in the flower of manhood.

He was evidently trying to control his nervousness and argue the matter calmly, for presently he left off gnawing his mustache, that had suffered somewhat from his fierce attack; and pushing back the dark hair that had fallen over his brow as he had run his fingers nervously through it, he went on more deliberately.

"Meg, my dear girl! I know my uncle better than you do, and I do him no injustice when I say that the only strong feelings he has ever evidenced are pride and obstinacy. Nothing else! Now if I never inherit anything from Lawyer DePew, I have these two precious qualities as a birthright. I am decidedly too proud to wait like a dog for a bone from his larder, and something too obstinate to give up what is dearer than my life. Come, Meg! Show yourself the true woman that you are, and in place of crushing down your heart with false reasoning, turn around and say you'll have me. That's a dear! Just look away from the dusty glass that is smutching your pretty little nose. Look at me, Meg. I really am a pleasanter object than those old barrels waiting for the garbage cart, and then if you'll look into my eyes you can never again doubt, since you believe in such an unfashionable part as the soul, that I love you with all I ever shall possess of that superior essence."

He put his arm tenderly about her, drawing her away from the contemplation of the unattractive street, and placing his hand under her soft chin, held up her face.

It was a pretty young face despite the swollen lids and the compliment of dust paid to its fairness

by the window, against which in her agitation she had leaned. And her eyes, just matching her hair, were very tender ones, as she looked into the darker face bended over hers. She was a tender little creature altogether, who until now had found life any thing but pleasant, since to her, an orphan, poor and almost friendless, it had been but a hard struggle for bare subsistence. Yet, with all this for past experience, she was steeling her heart against a very capable young fellow, who was most anxious to do the hard fighting for her, and give her the easier portion.

She had refused him for his sake, for his sake only. This she had told him months ago, when first he had asked her to marry him, and he, on her refusal, had boldly affirmed that she had not loved him.

Not love him? Every one must love him, and most of all she, who was so friendless, and to whom he had been so kind. She had assured him of this with sweet faltering speech, making it eloquent with her hot blushes and tender eyes. And he had laughed in his heart, for a woman's will seemed such a slight thing to withstand the power of their mutual love.

He had found it an impassable barrier, however, for she had no doubt of her own sincerity, and what was best for him. So she had not only withstood all the force of their young passion, but even his eloquence. Her determination had held him, though he had argued against it many times, and being by education a lawyer, he was "up" in special pleading.

Yet with all these advantages, she had not wavered in her refusal to accept him, whom alone she desired. For it was against his interest to marry her. She was sure of that. He was the nephew, namesake, and prospective heir of rich Lawyer De-Pew, whose copyist she had become through the chance of seeing an advertisement in a paper in

which, at a desperate moment, out of employment, and almost penniless, she had invested one of her few remaining nickels.

"Wanted, a copyist." This had inspired her with hope. A hope, strong enough to enable her to walk down town, through the crowded business streets of New York, and to hurry her up the long flights of dusty stairs, to the office of "Charles M. DePew, Attorney and Counselor-at-law."

So very beautifying was this hope, that she might obtain the position of copyist, that chancing to meet Charles DePew, nephew of the distinguished lawyer who had preceded his uncle to their place of business, he thought her the most charming girl he had ever seen. And being rather in the present æsthetic craze for ideals, he decided not to speak to her, lest the illusion of her young beauty be destroyed by some ungrammatical word or an inharmonious voice, for seeing by her costume that she was poor, he imagined she was uncultivated. So with a grave bow after her timid "yes" to his query whether she desired to see Mr. Charles M. DePew, he withdrew to an inner office where he regaled himself with the morning news and an occasional glance at her through the partly open door.

He had lived his life of twenty-eight years among New York's charming women, had become so used to the "darts and arrows" these bewildering creatures cast about them, that he had begun to believe himself invulnerable. Yet now, having most ceremoniously saluted Meg, he kept thinking of her, while she, poor little creature, with shining eyes and dry throat, thought only of, hoped only for, the position of the "wanted copyist."

Charles DePew was so much pleased with the girl's appearance that when his uncle entered the office, he put down the morning's journal, giving his entire attention to the conversation between Charles M. DePew and the young person seeking

employment. It was a very short interview, barely giving him time to decide that her voice was agreeable, her speech educated, when with a "Good morning, sir," she departed, carrying a roll of manuscript.

Once more chance threw Meg in the way of the young man, as with the manuscript she came late to the office, where he had been detained. This much Charles DePew owed to what is called fate, after which he took the affair in his own hands, and while still to Meg their constant meetings seemed the result of accident, they were due solely and entirely to the will of this decidedly strong-willed young fellow.

He was always early at the office on the days Meg was to bring the manuscript, and generally found business to delay him any afternoon when there was a possibility of her coming. He was frequently on the steps as she passed in or out, and once meeting her on the street, had remarked, in what Meg considered the purest kindness:

"It is quite late for a lady to be alone in the street, will you allow me to walk with you to the stage?"

"Thank you." Meg's grateful look made her more than ever charming to him. So charming, that he not only put her in the stage, but took the seat next hers, the manuscript out of her hand; in fact gave her an amount of care and attention, that made her lonely little heart well up with her gratitude. Yet she had asked him "please not to trouble himself further," when the stage stopping at her street, he had helped her down, and still carrying the manuscript, had walked a few steps with her. Whereat he had laughed, a frank, pleasant laugh, and said she had "queer notions about trouble," that this was a matter of pleasure as far as he was concerned. He made it a pleasure to her also, perhaps the greatest she had ever known. Yet when

they had reached the dingy house where Meg had found "reasonable board and lodgings," she had thanked him for his courtesy, and had not invited him in. He, to her, seemed as the sunshine to a flower. But she was such a wise little flower; she knew the sunshine was not for her. So well did she know this, that the next time the elegant Charles escorted her home, she asked him, with many blushes and much nervous trembling, "Please not to do so again."

"Am I so very disagreeable to you?" this wily Charles had asked. In answer to which Meg's fervent "Oh, no!" had made him declare with that mastery of manner, which with women constituted Charles DePew's principal attraction:

"Well then, since I am not absolutely unpleasant to you, and you are most pleasant to me, I certainly will do it again."

It had seemed a matter of course that this girl should yield to his will, as all other girls had done. But Meg had been country born, purely raised, educated by adversity, and learned in self-denial, so she had persisted in her request, that he should not again be her escort to her home. "For though you are much kinder than any one has been, since I an orphan lost by death my only friend, still, still, I can not walk with you. Because you are rich, and I am poor, and—and—it is not right," she had simply stated.

Perhaps Charles DePew had never yet lost his heart, because he had found lovely women so willing to conquer him. Perhaps this tender little creature was his fate, created for him especially. At any rate, as she gave him her reasons for declining the future pleasure of his company, he thought her blushes, her eyes, her whole self, the sweetest picture of woman the world held. In fact, that she was the woman for him. So with mock submission, that passed for real to her who was without guile,

he bowed his head, raised his hat, said "Good-by," with just sufficient regret to cut her to the heart, and—called at her house the following Sunday afternoon.

It was the style of house that Charles had often remarked, when he had passed the unfashionable streets where they do belong, as the "essence of discomfort." With dust all over it, shutters sinking into decrepitude, and the sidewalks barely complying with the city's regulations, there was nothing about it to invite, and every thing to repel. Yet it was the best home Meg had been able to obtain; its cheap board, the finest she could pay for; though she was willing, active and industrious, was fairly well educated, and had, besides her beauty, a sweet, true voice. This last she utilized as soprano in a poor church, where its salaries were in keeping with its circumstances. She had just returned from afternoon service on the Sunday of Mr. DePew's first call, and sitting in her very small apartment, was looking at the sky over the house-tops, trying to argue away the sorrow in her heart. She had tried during service to sing it away, but without success. For over the sweet tones of her voice, up it would rise, recalling to her memory the face of Charles DePew, as he had said "Good-by." And now the arguments and reasoning she was applying as correctives, were just as futile as the choir hymns and the church's prayers had been; until the landlady herself knocking at the door to announce:

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Stephens, and a mighty stylish one," sent sorrows flying to the outer darkness, and ushered joy into Meg's tender breast.

Excited, lovely, breathless, she had fairly flown down the steps, and, instead of reproving the gentleman as she fully intended to do, had sealed his fate and her own. For, from the moment when the introduction into that most unbeautiful parlor of the beautiful Meg Stephens had made Charles

DePew forget every thing but her, he determined to marry her.

He did not at once avow this determination, being far too well accustomed to woman's ways, but he informed Meg that instead of being the rich man she believed, he was only the poor nephew of the rich man, earning his living "by the sweat of his brow," and indebted to his uncle for his education only. That, as part repayment of this debt, he had resigned his chosen profession of assayer and geologist, had taken up the law, and, entering his uncle's office,had relieved him of the dull routine of business, which he would not entrust to a clerk. And, therefore, having set himself on a right basis with Miss Stephens, he declined to be driven away. That he would not submit to such cruel treatment, and having passed a particularly tedious week, he had come to carry her across the river to a pretty place where she could see grass and walk under trees. And would she please come for sweet charity's sake!

Of course, Meg declined, being constrained by her idea of duty. But since he was much larger and stronger than she, it was impossible to put him out of the house, which he declared was the only way she could get rid of him. And, as it was equally impossible to leave him when she was so entirely glad to be with him, they sat and talked in the ugly, poverty-stricken parlor, making it lovely with the verdure of their thoughts, and filling it with the flowers that were blooming in their hearts.

They had so much to say to each other, so many laugh-provoking fancies, that the hours passed gaily, ten o'clock finding them with as many thoughts as if they had just begun to talk.

This evening had been followed by many others, until DePew, reasonably secure, had asked Meg to have him, and had been refused. Her refusal, however, had only the more endeared her to her lover,

revealing, as it had done, her sweet, unselfish nature. Upon his determination to marry her, it had had no other effect than, if possible, to strengthen it. While she refused him, and assured him her answer was final, she could not be utterly hard with him, whom she so loved. Thus sometimes she would walk out with him, stipulating only that they should not go where his rich friends could see him, since in her own mind, with many a pang, she had long ago determined that some rich and lovely woman would, at some time, marry Charles DePew. And she, she would be the last one to stand in the way of his comfort and happiness, thought sweet Meg. It was during one of these walks, so delightful to both, that Lawyer DePew, driving in the park, chanced to see his nephew. And Charles DePew, with the most amiable audacity, had bowed to his uncle.

Mr. DePew, Sen., had never been remarkable for amiability. Now, however, when he saw his nephew, who in his handsome person and high intellect represented the pride of a long lineof DePews, walking through a shady lane with so insignificant an individual as a female copyist, the rich uncle grew furious. It had required all his self-control not to have at once descended from his elegant equipage and ordered away "*that* person." This was the best name he had for poor innocent Meg, who had not been aware of the rich man's propinquity, her eyes at that moment being fixed upon the landscape. The lawyer was so much excited by the possible results of her "designing conduct," that he could not wait until breakfast, when he would be sure to meet his nephew, but left word with the servant at the door to "Send Mr. Charles to the study as soon as he comes home."

Mr. Charles was in no hurry to return. Did not, in fact, until the afternoon was over and the evening spent with Meg, taking unto itself wings, he was

obliged to say, "Good-night." Then walking along the elegant street which numbered the DePews among its residents, he reached his uncle's mansion, received the message, and, with a laugh at what he knew was coming, entered the study where the elder DePew was raging alone.

His nephew's handsome face unclouded by fear of anything, irritated him beyond even the requirements of civility:

"How long has this thing been going on?" he asked, ignoring Charles' pleasant "Good evening, sir," and showing his white teeth in a most unsmiling grimace.

"What do you call *thing?*" Charles DePew certainly inherited some temper from his distinguished ancestors. For, as his uncle had spoken, his smile had vanished, his face had clouded black and angry, and though the older man's unreasoning rage should have provoked any reasonable man's amusement, there was no amusement in his nephew's answer, as without waiting for his uncle to speak, he went on:

"If, sir, you mean by *thing*, my attentions to Miss Stephens, they have been, and will go on, whenever that lady permits them. That they amount to nothing more than polite attentions, is because she will accept nothing more, having several months since refused to marry me."

"Marry *you!*" Lawyer DePew's voice rose to a shout at this astounding proposition. A DePew refused by a copyist! He glared at his nephew, muttering something that sounded like an imprecation. And Charles, glaring back at him, his dark face darkened by an angry flush, his gray eyes black with excitement, while he did not speak, was in his silence more impressive than a vocabulary of imprecations!

They made quite a study of the angry passion, these two well-educated and well-bred men. Only while Mr. DePew, Senior, with the angry wrinkles in his fresh-colored skin, his carefully tended whiskers

standing stiffly, as his drawn mouth disclosed his teeth, might have provoked laughter, his nephew, equally angry, would have awakened admiration. For, with his nostrils swelling, his brow in a heavy frown, his eyes flashing, and his teeth gleaming through the dark brown of his mustache, he certainly was a fine young fellow, whose elegance did not detract from his manliness.

Yet for all that, for all Lawyer DePew's wealth and position, and the buried ancestors of both, the two felt absolutely wolfish towards each other. Neither desiring any thing better than a violent conflict, from which nothing deterred them, but the trifling factors of education and society's requirements.

The sooner tired, because his eyes not being very strong, felt the strain of this prolonged stare, Lawyer DePew threw himself into a chair, and with the sneer on his lips that had enraged many a legal opponent, said:

"Are you aware, *Mr.* DePew, what consequences for you would be entailed if Miss Stephens were to consider her refusal, and accept you? Are you aware that *our* relations would be severed by such connection as your marriage with a copyist? It is doubtless a much elevated profession, this of Miss Stephens', but one I fail to appreciate, and one, moreover, that would destroy for *you* any hopes of inheritance from me."

Charles DePew's sneer quite matched his uncle's as he replied:

"My relations with you, sir, are not indispensable to my existence. As for future hopes of inheritance, I prefer making my own living to selling my manhood or truckling for a few dollars."

There was a little further of equally agreeable interchange of sentiment, wherein Lawyer DePew asserted that if his nephew continued his acquaintance with Miss Stephens, he should change his will

without delay; and his nephew urged him to do so, assuring him that the object of his life was to make Miss Stephens his wife, to which end he would use both opportunity and importunity. That to him no honor was equal to that of being her husband, which he would become as soon as he possibly could. After which both gentlemen bowed, both sneered, and wishing each other "Good evening," parted; each feeling himself thoroughly in the right, and believing the other to be an absolute fool. So much for the justice of man to man.

After the interview with his uncle, Charles DePew informed Meg that Lawyer DePew's temper being villainous, and his own less than angelic, they had quarreled; he had been formally disinherited. That he was glad of it, since the possibility of his uncle's money coming to him had made her refuse him; and that if she did not consent now to become his wife, when he had no one but himself to depend on, and was poor enough to suit any lover of poverty, he really did not care what became of him.

This reckless indifference to his future on the part of him she loved so wrung Meg's heart that the tears ran freely down her cheeks. Yet she strove to reason with him, to convince him it was his duty to consider his uncle's feelings and conciliate him. Being ignorant that she had been the cause of the quarrel, Meg was spared self-reproach; but she suffered so at Charles's determination, unless she concluded to become his wife, of going away forever somewhere—anywhere, that the gentle stream of her tears became a torrent, to hide which she had turned her eyes away, pressing her forehead against the glass.

Then, unable to see her lover's handsome face, and feeling less keenly the ardent love in his eyes, she had presented the reasonable side for his consideration.

"Even if you think you love me, it would be

better to wait before sacrificing all your opportunities by a hasty marriage you might regret. It is only right to consult your uncle's views. He may have some plans for your future, and though he may never leave you a cent, he has already given you a most liberal education."

Meg spoke gently and calmly, her words sending Charles striding about the room, until, having delivered himself, he stopped to look at the delicate girlish figure. Then, at the remembrance of her hard fight for her daily bread, and her uncomplaining sweetness, he put his arm around her, looked at her pretty tearful face, kissed her, and told her the matter was settled. That he would carry her off and marry her at once, unless, like a sensible girl, she would consent to be his wife, when he would get a special license, and to-morrow morning early they two would become one.

He was so very eloquent, reasonable, reckless and devoted, all at the same time, that Meg first begged for a few days to consider, and finally surrendered, gave him her promise, and became his property.

Then his happiness was so evident that she grew happy too, and seated together on the old sofa that had long since lost its springs, they were more to be envied than monarchs on their thrones.

"I am a lucky fellow, Meg, to have found you," said Charles, his eyes and face glowing; "and though you believed me penniless, I'm not quite. See! here are two hundred dollars," smoothing out the fresh bills he had been crumpling in his hands. "They are the last fees I shall ever receive in my uncle's office. They don't make a very great capital, but they are more than Adam had when he began housekeeping, and I think I am a better fellow than that old vagabond. So you see, my girl, you have the advantage of one woman. Now, what I propose is to start out to the Black Hills. There's a great field there for a lawyer; and if I don't succeed in

that, I can turn assayer. The mining excitement is just beginning. It promises to be a great camp, and I'm tired of this conventional life. Are you willing?"

Of course Meg was. So the next morning a carriage drove up to the dingy boarding-house, and drove away with Miss Stephens to a parochial residence where, her lover having previously made all arrangements, she became Mrs. Charles DePew, and Charles himself became happy as a manly fellow can be, who has won for his wife the girl he loves, and knows how to value her.

CHAPTER II.

"THEY START AWAY."

HAVING enlarged his capital by the sale of every available possession, Charles wrote a note to his uncle, informing him of his marriage, and regretting that their opinions were at such divergence, signed himself his "sincere nephew," directed it to his office, and put it in the mail-box.

This done, he gave himself up to happiness, which, being a rare boon to man, he all the more appreciated. And no man could be happier than Charles DePew, nor woman than Meg, as together they looked out of the windows of the comfortable "sleepers" upon the farms and prosperous towns of New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio; the rolling prairies and bounteous fields of Illinois and Iowa, as the cars rushed westward. The streams that ran on their way, sparkling in the sunshine, or hiding in the shadows, called forth laughs of pleasure, as, indeed, when one is happy, trivial things will do, and nature seems a friend, whose heart beats responsive to joy.

Crossing the great iron bridge that spanned the Missouri, was a fresh source of wonder to the untraveled girl. Fresh also to the traveled man, who though he had journeyed much, had never been so happy as now, could never as now, find equal pleasure in any thing. Even the bleak plains, that seem deserts after the flowery eastern lands, were not without beauty to this happy pair. For desolate as were the lonely cabins, these two concluded that there, if together, they could be happy;

and forthwith the unlovely plain buildings, took upon themselves the halo of that paradise from which being cast away, cynics call—the fool's.

At Sidney they left the train, finding the ugly little town teeming with excitement. A Union Pacific train had been stopped, robbed, and the thieves were here now in hiding, was whispered in the new-comers' ears. Each resident of the station, that had gone into freighting to the Black Hills, being anxious to increase its importance, was pleased to claim for it any distinction. "This is an adventure, Meg!" said Charles, catching the excitement; "if these encounters are frequent, I must provide myself with pistol and bowie-knife."

But Meg having all a woman's fear for weapons, her husband compromised the matter by walking around the town with her, while both tried to imagine which, among the many big-hatted, heavily-bearded men, were the redoubtable thieves.

All, however, looking equally innocent, or guilty, they gave up the matter as an impossible conundrum, and on the following morning, under sky of purest, clearest blue, started for the Black Hills.

The stage was crowded, men, women, and children hurrying out to the mines, risking all the fatigues and dangers of the trip—to make a fortune.

Each stage that went dreaded an attack from the Indians, a number of whom had left the reservation, and almost every stage was overhauled by those gentlemen who take your valuables, break open the mails, and yet are politely called, "Road Agents." But all these were nothing in the scale, weighted with that wonderful fortune each was sure to make.

To invest the trip with something like a romance, DePew secured the two seats on the box for Meg and himself. The driver's demurs at "A lady ter come up here," being cut short by the appearance of Meg's pretty face, his frown changing to a broad smile, as quick and active she climbed over the

wheel, seating herself beside him with a pleasant "Good-morning."

And the smile grew yet more genial when DePew handing him a cigar invited him to smoke, with the words: "My wife doesn't object."

"Your wife! Wal that's too bad. I thought she was your sister, an' was a thinking what a time yer'd hev with all them fellers in the hills. They is stuck arter gals. An ugly 'un gets lots o' chances. But a purty 'un! My! Well! shake," he put out his great hand, "I wishes yer luck." A warm hand-shake all around made them good friends, as the stage being packed full, with a motley crowd from a squalling infant to an old man; the driver shouted "All aboard!" gave a crack of his whip, a yell to his team, and with a jerk that nearly threw Meg to the ground, off they started.

That she laughed in place of screaming, raised her yet higher in the driver's esteem.

"I'm glad o' yer pluck," he said, and then after saying over her head to DePew, "She's ahead o' most women," gave his attention to his team of four horses.

They were wild young broncos with plenty of spirit and no particular gait. Galloping, running, trotting, all varieties of going were allowed, provided only that they went. The slightest lagging was punished with the sharp cut of the whip, at whose whiz, with kicking, springings, and jumpings, the horses would dash ahead in a manner that, with less tough traces, would have set them free.

But the tugs held firm, and the broncos dashed onward, pulling the stage rapidly after them.

With her arm locked in her husband's, Meg gazed over the wild country through which they were racing. What a great expanse of desert! But a desert of most wonderful skies, most beautiful effects of light and shade, making alkali spots seem fair lakes, until on approach the water would vanish, and

there, before them, would lie patches of useless earth, parching, cracking for the water it had simulated.

In varying colors rocks were piled into all manners of shapes, making Meg's heart beat as she fancied them fortresses behind which Indians were waiting to attack them, and then thrill with admiration as under the frowning battlements they dashed, and she saw they were but monuments of piled-up sand, hardened to rocks, monuments placed by nature in the desert making beauty ever out of desolation.

"We'll be at the fust station in less time nor yer ken count fifty," said the driver, turning on Meg a face so covered with alkali dust that, except the twinkling blue eyes, he too seemed a part of those wonderful rocks. Face, beard, hat, all were alkali, the only living remnant those twinkling eyes. So merrily they twinkled, so jolly he looked, that Meg laughed, a gay little laugh.

"Larfin' at me, are yer? Yer are a nice little woman," he said, and then with "Gol darned! Ef we ain't hyer afore I knowed it!" jerked back the team before a building, so low and small that it seemed to have mysteriously arisen from behind a sandhill. Men were already leading the broncos to the stable. Exhausted, they went quietly enough.

Not so the team leaving it, who, harnessed ready to start, young, unbroken, looking around in affright, struggled with the hostlers, who, at heads and sides, with pushes, kicks, and all the words of soothing and command known to their occupation, forced them to their places.

They were four such unruly young brutes that, even when the leaders were secured, the men still held their heads, until the driver shouting "Ready!" they sprang back. And not one instant too soon, for, freed, the horses leaped forward, making the stage-coach fairly fly.

"Them's the team! The boss team on the road! No use fer a whip fer them," the driver said with pride, as in a dead run, up hill, down hill, across gullies, on level ground, on went the horses in their swift pace.

It was as much as Meg could do to keep her seat, although her husband's arm was around her, steadying her, and the driver called, "Hitch on ter me!"

There was no chance now to look at the surrounding country. Filled with the excitement of the fine animals, her eyes were fixed on the two black heads, one bay, and one gray, as each horse strained every muscle in the effort to outdo the other in this mad race.

"They are splendid creatures," exclaimed DePew. "It seems a shame they should have no better destiny than to wear themselves out pulling a stage-coach."

"Don't yer enjoy them? I do! We ain't got but one life to live, let's enjoy the best o' it," the driver shouted back in disconnected sentences, while the wind went whistling by, and the horses, untired, spun along their twentieth mile. Fresh of life as at the start, they required all the driver's strength to pull them back, back, until, sweating and trembling, they stopped, obedient to man's will, and waited for unharnessing.

"Well done, my beauties!" called the driver. Giving a word of direction so the hostlers, he sprang to the ground and held up his hands to Meg. "Come down, young woman, and take your first rancher's dinner. This is frontier life," he said.

Meg, filled with excitement from her quick passage through air, to exhilarating that her flesh seemed bathed in a tonic, looked around in disappointment. Was this a ranch? This forlorn house of discolored lumber, with a great pile of empty cans at the door, like bones around the giant castles where the redoubtable Jack went seeking adventures.

"Oh!" she sighed, "I had thought that on a real frontier ranch, bears' skins would be in profusion, with deers' antlers over doors! Something quite different from this."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the driver, "them's the picter's as sets boys wild. But, whiles I don't say as how b'ars and deers can't be sometimes found, they is a past fashion. Men has killed so many young bucks, buffaloes and b'ars, thet the beasts hes growed monstrous cunnin', an' keeps far away. It once was thet these plains would sometimes be anigh black with a herd o' wild buffaloes, their eyes red like danger-lights on a car, an' their tails switchin' the air, while above 'em rose a cloud o' dust, warnin' men ter fly. But them days is passed"—he shook his head —"they has passed. Gone like the glory o' stage drivin'. Now, any man ken get the place es ken hold the lines. But onct a stage driver was a feller as had some power, some rights."

He drew himself up to his full height, and with ruddy face, bright eyes, strong, vigorous body, he made a fine picture of the "power o' a stage driver."

"A past fashion," his face grew serious; "yer see money's lord now. Even out here with lots o' room ter spare, an' not too much chance for spendin' it, the fellers catches the disease, an' it ain't so much a helpin' each other an' a gloryin' in fightin' an enemy, whether it's b'ars or redskins, as it's a layin' up a pile 'cause some other feller did it. Them millionaires hes done more harm to the workin' class than so many famines would ha' done."

The old fellow sighed as he ruminated over the general degeneracy of the times. And Meg, whose heart, while not particularly against millionaires, knew something of the "workin' class," looked at him with sympathizing eyes. Seeing which Ned gave a laugh, the twinkle coming back to his own. "Yer is pityin' me! Yer is ready ter pity anythin'

from a mule ter a stage-driver. Waal, pity's a purty thing when it looks out o' your face. But don't you waste it. I was jest a philosophizin'. These ain't sech bad times! The pay's sure. Climate's healthy, an' we does hev a little excitement atween the road agents an' the raids o' the Injuns, when they wants ter try the guns Uncle Sam pervides fer their amusement."

"Dinner!" called in a dismal, guttural voice, roused the driver from his reminiscences, and DePew coming for his wife, she entered the house, whose interior of one room, with greasy stove, piles of bedding thrown in a corner, and long table of very unclean lumber, was less attractive than the yawning, empty cans. For out doors there was the sky to look at, the pure air to breathe. While here: Meg's pretty nose gave an involuntary curl, as the whiffs of burning beef and dirty blankets came to its nostrils.

Seated beside her husband, she began a study of the art culinary as presented by a rancher, on the stage route to Deadwood, and although her appetite was sharpened by her long ride, the study was most short, and result unsatisfactory; since her poor little stomach positively refused the great chunks of beef swimming in grease, and the potatoes supplemented by a dressing of flies. Even DePew, who had determined to "rough it," was brought to a sudden pause by those flies. "They are too small game for a first western dinner," he whispered Meg. And Ned, the stage driver, who had been joking the hosts, catching the remark, laughed long and heartily.

"I say, Jack!" he called to the owner of the guttural voice, "these fellers are making fun o' yer cookin'. Now I'll jest take my Bible oath, thet you hes furnished 'em one thing that the city o' New York can't furnish better."

At which bold assertion of Ned's, the guttural voice and its owner, a dismal-looking young man, was roused to something like interest.

"What's it?" he asked, while speculation glimmered in his dull eyes.

"What's it? Why yer has put it here! Can't yer tell?" asked Ned, waving his hand towards the most unattractive repast of beef and potatoes that can be imagined.

"No, I can't," said Jack, as, having looked up and down, his eyes came back to Ned.

"Yer can't," said Ned with scorn. "Why, man, ther salt!" He shouted out the word with a roar of laughter, as he pushed back his plate, and bowing to Meg, went out to see "after things."

A few minutes later, "Time's up," he called, and the passengers hurrying to their places, they rode away from the dismal house, with its yawning empty cans, and Meg's first disillusion of frontier life. In noontide fury the sun poured down upon them. The freighting teams which, in goodly numbers, were making for the El Dorado, were pitiable to see. Toiling along, with tongues hanging out of mouths, they uttered their mute protest against their drivers' haste in spite of their pain. The stage passed quickly, giving them its dust. Its passengers, inside and out, overpowered by the oppressive heat, were reduced to silence. Only the fretful crying of a child, and Ned's calls to his team, mingled with the rattling of the wheels and creaking of the springs.

The least concerned of all in Ned's command, was his team. Deaf to his voice, indifferent to the sharp cuts of his whip, they pursued the even tenor of their way, neither increasing nor decreasing their moderate pace.

They were a contrast, not too pleasant, to the fiery beasts left at the ranch. "But we hes ter hev jest sech brutes as these," Ned explained to Meg, "for the long laps of road that must be passed at noon-time, where water is found only at distances of twenty and thirty miles."

The first break to the monotony of this drive was

the meeting with the down stage, that heralded its coming by a cloud of dust, stopping when side by side with Ned's coach, while the drivers exchanged gossip.

"Deadwood's risin' like yeast powder! California capital's comin' in! Great strike in the DeSmith and Homestake!"

These words from the driver of the down coach made DePew's heart beat, for he fancied himself already a millionaire, and kept dreaming of what he would do, and how Meg should outshine the fashionables of New York, while Meg herself thought principally of the team that Ned now, discarding his whip, was urging on with chain and stick; in her pitiful heart fulfilling Ned's words about mules.

"I—I'm afraid you will kill them!" she said, timidly touching Ned's arm and looking at the mules.

"Kill 'em!" laughed Ned, as he gave them a sounding whack. "They's used ter it. It's quar, this livin'. A fine horse, or a fine man, jest steps out o' life fer the derndest trifle, an' miserable critters, beasts or human, hangs on ter livin' an' endurin' fer years. It's all quar. But we gits used ter it. Ef we can't, why we jest lays down by the road side like that," he pointed to a dead ox, that had probably fallen under its load, and was left to perish in this desert. "I'll come ter it some day. Jest leave my ole carcass as a compliment ter these plains I has rid over so often."

Before Meg could utter the sympathizing words that rose to her lips, Ned had taken a flask from his pocket, and on DePew's refusal to "jine," indulged in a good swallow of its contents.

"Wal, young man," he said, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "When yer hes lived as long an' worthless a life as I hes, yer'll find that when sperrits is low, it's mighty handy ter hev a little outside, that on pourin' down, raises a feller's."

Whatever the spirits might do to other people,

these "sperrits" raised Ned's, for he drove on, smiling at his thoughts, despite the power of dust and temperature.

The sun, still holding its furious heat, had changed its rays to evening's crimson, when the stage arrived at the Reservation of the Sioux.

It was a formidable looking camp, this reservation, with its rows upon rows of wigwams, some of canvas, some of cedar, and its groups of tall, sinewy men, whose yellow thighs, exposed to view, displayed their strong muscles.

"Look at 'em, the tigers!" said Ned. "Here they is fed, clothed, fostered in their wuthlessness. An' when they gits tired o' government pap, off they goes on the war path, brains a babby, kill its daddy, violates its mammy, an' arter a fight or so, they is amnestied, and brought back ter their reservation. So when they wants to go out agen, they ken, good and handy. Now, sir, either we is wrong, or we is right. If we is right ter come out and try ter make these plains give us a livin', an' pay taxes ter the government, why should we be kept as targets fer the redskins? Why should they be fed, fattened, provided with firearms ter kill us? An' if we is wrong, why doesn't the United States just give up this mighty West with its gold regions, its cattle raisin', its increasin' civilization? Why don't it jest give up the whole of Ameriky ter the wild devils? It's quar rulin' an' mightily mixed! The government a sayin' it can't give up this country ter barbarism. Yet I'll be derned if it don't foster 'em in barbarism, makin' 'em feel that we pioneers, who bars all the hardships, are thieves an' our women prey fer the wild beasts ter destroy. I tell yer it makes my blood bile! Ef they wants ter civilize them, why don't they make 'em work? Why don't they let 'em know that work or starve's the tune they've got ter' dance to, and be derned if they're of more consequence than the white man who has built up the country."

Excited by his theme Ned barely finished as the stage, passing through part of the encampment, stopped at a low cedar building, the dwelling of the Indian agent.

Around in picturesque groups were tall men, whose shoulders, arms, and thighs gleamed yellow through the openings of the blankets thrown about them. Young women with pappooses on their backs, old women with children crowding around, and all alike with the long noses, high cheek bones, and sharp eyes of the Sioux, who are among the most warlike of our aborigines.

"There's an Indian coquette, Meg! Look!" said her husband in an undertone. The inside passengers getting out, he had glanced around with vivid interest on the novel scene, until his eyes fell upon three Indians, who in their grouping told a romance.

Two of them braves, young and fiery, stood at each side of a squaw, who, tall as they, and sinewy, too, looked away with proud indifference from the eyes they fixed on her face.

Her skirt of bright flannels, the beaded moccasins, the chains of gewgaws strung around her neck and arms, together with the feathers stuck in her head, proclaimed her a personage of rank and consequence, and the bright patches of brick-dust paint on her cheeks, the streaks of it dyeing the parting of her hair, and the ornamentation of dark green paint on brow and throat, evidenced her strict attention to the beautifying effects of Indian toilet.

Low as was DePew's voice, the squaw must have heard it. Or perhaps she caught only his glance; perhaps she saw only that he was a young and handsome fellow. Whatever induced her, she advanced a step, looked at him steadily, and then gravely bowed to him.

Instantly DePew's hat was in the air, and the bow returned with the grace of an accomplished gentle-

man; and instantly, with knives glistening in their hands, the ardor of their faces changed to rage, the two braves sprang before the squaw, menacing the white man who had received the favor.

"Husband!" Meg cried, as she threw her arms around DePew, trying to shield him with her body.

"Foolish child, there is no danger. Not here!" said her husband reassuring her, forgetting in her terror the squaw, the braves, even the lookers-on of his own race; when a disdainful "pst" from the squaw made both husband and wife look up, as with head in air, and contempt in every line of her curling lips, "Milk face!" she hissed, and turning away, walked off, followed by the braves.

If, however, Meg did not awaken Indian admiration, she soon experienced their curiosity. For regaling herself with a good wash, during the waiting of the stage, she was startled by a noise at the small window which lighted the room. Turning, she screamed in affright at the faces crowded into the aperture, chattering like monkeys, with bright, bead-like eyes, laughing at her, until at her husband coming, at his angry voice and threatening gestures they disappeared and returned no more. But Meg did not feel safe until, once again mounted beside Ned, the coach rolled away from the agency.

"Oh," she said, with a shudder, as she looked back on the Indian encampment, "I was terrified lest they should spring upon and murder us."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ned, "They ain't fer killin' jest now. They hes hed two or three sech parties o' pleasure lately, and thar's extra troops up yonder waiting ter swoop down on 'em. No, they ain't fer killin' so nigh ter the encampment." He pointed off where, over the hill, there was a United States flag flying, and the low white building of a western barracks.

"No, thar ain't no fear o' bein' killed jest now, at this agency. I know the Injuns, havin' spent a life

studyin' 'em. They kills what can't defend itself. A terror o' what they might get an' what they doesn't quite understand, goes a heap o' distance with them. But don't yer never turn yer back on them! Thar's suthin' so temptin' ter an Injun, in a white man's back; that I'd not trust 'em with mine. No, not ef the Lord hed sent me an invite tu visit heaven, and a angel stood a holdin' open the gate."

At the next station Ned parted from them.

"I hes taken an uncommon shine ter yer tur," he said, when the station house came in sight. "Uncommon! P'rap's it's because yer pretty an' plucky," he said to Meg. "P'rap's it is 'cause yer is jest startin' out in life, an' I'd not like fer yer horses ter baulk, afore yer gits ter the fust station. Now I don't know ef yer hev a big book account, or ef yer hes all yer money with yer, but I advises yer, ef yer'd not be robbed by the agents, tu let her hide it. They never teched a woman 'till one o' them, like a fool, bragged o' savin' the men's money. And even now, they seldom disturb a pretty 'un. Leastwise the money stands the best chance with her," nodding his head toward Meg. "An' ef yer a sensible feller, yer'll jest throw up yer hands, and let 'em go through yer."

"Thank you!" said De Pew, "but I've no notion to do any man's bidding, and submitting to highway robbery is something I decidedly object to."

"Shoo! Shoo!" Ned looked around cautiously, stooping over Meg to whisper to her husband, "Don't yer speak so loud, yer never knows who's about," and then, still in a low tone, "Yer'll be a derned fool, ef yer throws yerself agin an institution like that. A fool as'll make a widder o' yer pretty wife. Who knows who's in with these agents? Sometimes I think the conspiracy starts wi' parties in the cars, fer they do find out uncommon sure when money's aboard. Now, jest fer sport, ef they come'd up while I was with yer, I'd say let's fight

'em. But I leaves yer here, all safe an sound, and while I don't like ter accuse no man, I'd not tell a friend o' mine to trust every stage driver. They do say as some o' the drivers are in the perfession with the agents. But that's neither here nor there. They hes the drop on yer, an' ef yer resists, yer'll be shot dead. An' it'll be small comfort ter her, to know yer died resisting highway robbery."

This was a tragical ending to their wedding trip. An ending Meg by no means approved. She had been willing to share dangers, fatigue, hardships. But when these came in the shape of death to her husband, all her pluck vanished. And in her distress, being most lovely, as well as most powerful in her present influence over DePew, she soon reduced him to terms. He declared that for her sake he would consent to the undignified position of being an unresisting victim to the knights of the road. And she called him a darling, in the very softest whisper, while she secreted their small fortune in her white bosom, and then thanked Ned for his timely counsel. The only proviso DePew made, was:

"Remember, no man lays his hands on you. If he does, I'll kill him, though I am killed the instant after." With this, Meg had to be content, resolving in her mind that if the emergency arose, when she would be called on to hold up her hands too, that she would hand out the money and ask them, "Please not touch her, as her husband would not like it." Which reason appearing all-sufficient to her innocent soul, she bade "Good-by" to old Ned with many thanks for his kind advice and interest in them.

CHAPTER III.

ADVENTURES ON THE ROAD.

"GOOD-BY, and good luck ter yer both," shouted Ned, waving his hat to them, as seated beside the new driver they rode away from the station.

It was sometime after sunset, but the clear soft atmosphere still held the brightness of day. A charming breeze refreshed the travelers, the exquisite shades of ever-changing clouds, and the feeling that they too were all the world to each other, made the hour beautiful to them, made the whole world a place of delight.

With hand clasped in hand, on the top of a stage-coach, riding into a wild, unsettled country, they had their paradise with them, for such is love!

The driver, to whom as "Mister Jake Scott," Ned had introduced them with great solemnity, looked straight ahead, hardly noticing them after his bow, on learning from Ned that they were Mister and Mistress DePew, frien's o' mine."

"Another phase of western character," DePew had said to his wife, and with face burned almost black, with dark eyes that looked fierce under the broad-brimmed hat pulled over them, Jake was most unlike kindly old Ned.

As they neared the supper station, that in a grove of willows rose like an oasis in the desert, Jake roused himself sufficiently to say:

"A nice place, and well cooked meals. The best on the road," surprising DePew, by the modulation of his voice and his pronunciation, both of which, even in this short speech, were those of an educated

man. And DePew making a remark, which was aptly answered, the two were soon in animated conversation, wherein Josephus, Confucius, and others equally famous, were alternately quoted by the aristocratic scion of the DePews, and the weather-beaten, untidy stage driver.

"Pardon me," said DePew, after he had assisted Meg to dismount, and stood beside the driver, "but your information surprises me. You tell me you have been most of your life stage driving, yet you are as well-read as a college graduate. Opportunity is something in this world. How have you had the opportunity to study so much?"

Jake smiled, showing white teeth. He was pleased at DePew's compliment, although it embarrassed him. For a moment or so he hesitated, then with another smile, and another gleam of the white teeth, said:

"Mr. DePew, when I am up there on my seat, holding the lines, and looking ahead where earth meets sky, I feel the equal of any man. I feel the littleness of ambition, the worthlessness of money; for in a moment, by the arrow of a savage, I have seen the darkening of the brightest ambition, the uselessness of wealth to add one moment's existence to the most valuable life. But here on the ground those things seem of more consequence. I find myself at a disadvantage. Let us discuss something else than Jake Scott. Are you not hungry? Let us go in and discuss the supper. We will both find it more satisfactory than *I* can ever be to either."

He had spoken with a grace, dignity, and at the same time diffidence, which more than ever impressed DePew, who, when he had said to Jake, "I fear I overstepped the boundary line of politeness," and Jake had replied:

"Certainly not, sir. It is only the fool who mistakes interest for impertinence;" the men shook hands with a warm grip, that told more plainly than words that between these two, so widely separated

in the social scale, there was a possibility of that companionship, which is the true soul of friendship.

They walked to the door where Meg stood looking in on a neat table spread with a white cloth and covered by a tempting meal. Several men were seated at the upper end, whose laughter at some joke was checked by the appearance of Meg, awaiting her husband, before seating herself.

"Will you sit by the fire and rest for a moment? The hostess has gone for some hot coffee," said one of the four travelers, whose light wagon outside and wraps thrown on a chair told that they had some moments preceded the stage in their enjoyment of the hospitality of this pleasant house.

"I fear we have been like the locusts of Egypt; we were too hungry to think of those who might be coming after us. Now, however, if I could I would go hungry a week, that you might have the choicest fare."

The speaker was a young, boyish-looking fellow, so small and slight that as she stood near him, Meg's stature lacked not much of his. So very young and childish he seemed, that while Meg's lovely color rushing to her cheeks made her prettier than ever, she could not resent his gallantry. It was more amusing than offensive.

"Thank you," she said, much as she would have done to a boy aping man's manners. "You are very kind; but I think I will rest better standing. We have been on the stage-coach since dawn."

"Indeed!" the boy replied, with much tender sympathy compressed into that little word. Tenderness, too, in the bright blue eyes fixed on her, as he asked with a boy's outspoken frankness:

"Who could have been so cruel as to have brought you to this wild country?"

Meg laughed a gay little laugh; for as she had looked at the youngster, his slight figure, delicately

pretty face, and small hands, she had been tempted to ask him the question he had asked of her. This West certainly was a wonderful country, where stage drivers were learned as her own husband and children had the manners of men.

"You have a charming laugh," said the boy. "It does me good to hear it." The good he felt was evidenced by the pleasure in his face, as, smiling, he advanced a step nearer Meg, when DePew, entering, touched her on the shoulder as she stood by the open fire with her back to the door.

"Come, Meg," he said, "we have a good meal before us." His voice and manner proclaimed their relationship even without Jake's,

"Here is a seat for your wife, Mr. DePew," as he pulled out two chairs.

"Married!" Alas for me!" whispered the boy, when, passing him with a bow, Meg seated herself beside her husband.

She had, however, heard the whispered words, and bit her lips to keep back the laughter at the comical effect of this child playing at the manners and gallantries of an old beau.

"What do you suppose could have brought such a child to this country?" she whispered to her husband.

"Villainy, perhaps," answered DePew, who at the moment, catching the boy's admiring eyes fixed on his wife, felt more like thrashing than laughing at him.

The boy saw his angry look, bowed to Meg, nodded to Jake with an "Ah, Jake, amiable as usual?" and returned to his seat at the other end of the table, where, to judge from the laughter of the three men old enough to be his father, he was the soul of the feast.

Meg was so curious to know something of this child that she glanced at Jake intending to ask him. Jake, however, seemed lost in a gloomy reverie, so she turned to her husband: "He must be some one of consequence," she said.

"More likely some run-away scapegrace," answered her husband. Adding, "If he looks at you again, I'll throw him out of doors," in a tone that evidenced his jealousy.

Foolish as it might seem to be jealous of a boy whose age did not appear to reach seventeen, Meg respected her husband, loved him; and, though she had never in her life felt equal curiosity as now, did not again glance at, or seem to be aware of the existence of, the pretty child who had amused her.

"Here's to woman, lovely woman!" It was the boy's voice as, rising in his chair, he tossed off a glass of wine, and then directing one of his companions to take some bottles from their basket, he left them with, "My compliments," he said, to the company generally, as he bowed his farewell.

Passing Meg's chair, "We will meet again," he whispered, in a tone so low and soft that DePew, who was at that moment being served by the hostess to a most appetizing ragout, did not hear him.

At the door the boy turned, determined to catch Meg's eyes. Involuntarily she looked up. "Farewell!" he said, and with a graceful bow, had disappeared, as DePew sprang to his feet.

"I beg you will not. He is only a child," implored Meg, holding to her husband's hand.

"He is a child that shall be punished for impertinence," said her husband.

But somehow the landlady stood in his way. And though it was but a moment before she moved aside, light wheels were heard, and a voice calling back "Farewell," announced the departure of the three men with the "pretty boy."

"They've gone, sir. It's no use," the landlady said, apologetically. And then, "You'd better sit down, or every one will be talking and asking."

They were all busy enough just now with knives and forks. But DePew, knowing it was too late, for the boy was off, and seeing the distress in Meg's

face, resumed his seat. After a moment or so, he grew ashamed of his jealous anger, pressed Meg's hand under the table as a mute apology, and, recovering his appetite with his good temper, made an excellent meal.

"Do you know that boy?" he asked of the landlady as he paid her.

"Know him! You bet," she answered. Pretty and tidy she glowed with pleasure, as she went on. "Why, that boy, as you call him, is the daringest devil in the West. It would just turn your head to know half he's done. Boy! Well, I'd not be afraid to pit him against a dozen men! You see, I thought as how Charley had made you mad, and I didn't want to see you hurt, so I jest stood in your way till he'd gone."

This last, being whispered, and said in perfect good faith, amused DePew. He laughed heartily before he could reply:

"My good woman," he said, "when I can't protect myself against boys, I deserve to be hung."

"Oh! sir. You don't know nothin' about Charley. He's the best shot I ever seen, lest Jake here can beat him."

At which adroit compliment, Jake, who had been rather moodily eating his supper, sprang up excitedly. "Well, I can try," he said.

"Well, Jake, I always has boasted on you, but tonight, as I'm living, I came near taking a back seat. You'll have to jerk up if you beats Charley, for he went to the tree where you left three bullets side by side, and if he didn't put three, one just a-top of each, I ain't speakin' to you now. Then he says, with his sweetest smile, 'Tell Jake never to speak again till he's buried my three bullets with three of his'n.' We was laughing over it, and Charley's saying you'd not take up his dare, when the stage drove up."

"Not take up his dare! Let Charley look to it

that I don't take him up," said Jake, with flashing eyes, as he left the room, and, going to the stage, took from underneath the apron a fine rifle.

Examining it by the light of pine torches he had stuck into the ground, he walked to the tree where, deeply buried in the trunk, were Charley's bullets with the mark on them. Then measuring off the paces, Jake took his position. Bang! bang! bang! the shots followed quick one on another, DePew raising the huzza of victory, when on examining the tree, they found the bullets driven in, each on top of Charley's.

"I congratulate you!" said DePew, holding out his hand, "you not only talk like a sage, but you shoot like a Nimrod. Come with us to the Black Hills. We are just starting out to make our fortune. You shall share equal with us. Shan't he, Meg?"

The three stood alone, for the landlady, picking up Jake's gun, had carried it into the house, and was handing it around for the admiration of the stage passengers. When Meg, appealed to by her husband, added her invitation to his, with equal kindness and heartiness, Jake looked from one to the other without speaking. All excitement had vanished from his face, and, in the light from the torches he might have stood for a statue of gloom, so sad were his great eyes. His voice, however, was very quiet as he replied:

"I thank you! I will not forget you! For my life has had few friends, and, until now, I have never had a chance to better it. But such as it is, I am tied to it. Tied to it by an oath of vengeance against the redskins. In one day they destroyed all I cared for. I swore I'd bide my time and take my revenge. And I've done it, year by year when they go out on their war-path. They know my name and tremble at it. I've never missed my aim, and, by heaven, I never will!"

His voice rose in whispered vehemence, as he took off his hat, like one registering a solemn vow, and disclosed a white forehead which was in as strange contrast to his sun-burned face as was his character to his occupation.

"I am sorry you will not go with us; sorry your nature binds you to this constant retrospect," said DePew.

"Perhaps you will change your mind," Meg's soft voice broke in.

"No, madam." Jake had resumed his quiet tone. "No! My mind has been so firmly fastened to this purpose, only dissolution can release it. And," with a shrug, "it has gone on so long that I am only fit for driving and dreaming—or shooting redskins," he finished with a laugh that had in it no amusement. And then, the team being ready, climbed to his seat, reaching down to help up Meg, while DePew seating himself at her other side, and the inside passengers taking their places, the coach recommenced its journey.

They had ridden some distance, the green willows of the station lost to view behind the sand hills, and the moon, with a luster unknown to less pure atmospheres, shining upon them before Jake again spoke.

"This air is glorious!" his voice had something of enthusiasm in it, and his eyes had lost their gloom. "Perhaps, Mr. DePew, it is impossible for you, who have been reared in a city, to understand what these great plains are to us. This desert, as it may seem to others, to us is but breathing space. Here we are like the untamed eagles. Free! Lords of all we survey! While in a city, what would I be? Nothing! Just a worthless fellow, hardly fit for a hostler! No! keep to your life. With your wife and perhaps the children who will come, life is altogather different for you. But I thank you, and you, madam. Long after you have forgotten me, I will sit on my driver's box, and dream of you both."

"We will not forget you, Jake," said DePew, and then they were silent, each thinking, until Meg gradually fell asleep.

How long she slept she did not know, wakening with a start as she heard men's voices, and looking down on the roadside she saw a horseman with a rifle slung before him.

He was much excited, rising in his stirrups, and pointing backward as he spoke:

"'Bout twenty on 'em. 'Scaped from the agency. Some squaws, all drinkin', an' bent on deviltry."

"Did you see them?" asked Jake.

"See 'em? No! I was too derned anxious ter git home," with which words he bade "good-by," put spurs to his horse, hurrying along the road they had come.

Meg looked at her husband. Her heart beating with affright, changed to pitiful love as she saw the stern anxiety in his face.

He was thinking of her, for he took her hand, holding it with fierce tenderness as he scanned the horizon. He was looking for that foe to whom woman's sex and helplessness is the incentive to crimes before which murder sinks to nothingness.

Jake too, was looking about him. There was on his face an easy confidence, almost a smile as he said under his breath:

"Twenty! I can manage half. Twenty! They'll be a nice troop to send to the devil."

Meg shuddered at his words.

"O Lord," she prayed in her soul, so earnest in the prayer that she knew not her whispered words were audible. "O Lord, protect us from the savages and protect them from us. Save us from murder, O Lord!"

"Murder," said Jake bitterly. "Would you think it murder, madam, to kill a deadly cobra? No cobra, no beast, is half so brutally cruel as these Indians! Live among them for years, as I have done, and you

will not sentimentalize over them. You will not pray for them! You will stoop, as I do, for your rifle, take your aim, and killing them, feel that for such devils, a bullet is the only prayer."

As he spoke he reached for his rifle, when the satisfaction vanished from his face, his eyes widened, and into them came despair.

"Not there!" he hoarsely whispered. "Not there! I have forgotten it!"

He sprang to his feet, holding still to the reins, as onward hurried the horses. Standing, as he gazed backward, while upon his face there came that look, which might rise to a shipwrecked sailor.

"Forgotten it! O fool! Driveling idiot! That I should forget the only thing which has never betrayed me."

He struck his head with his clenched fist, and still muttering, retook his seat.

After a moment DePew spoke:

"Jake," he said quietly, though his face was still sternly anxious and his hand held Meg's as if nothing but death could part them, "Jake, you understand the Indians. What is best for us to do? Is it safer to go on, or turn back?"

"There's no safety either way, sir. Unarmed anywhere, and we are at their mercy. As for turning back, that's impossible. I have the mail, I must carry it." Then seeming to rouse himself from his despair, Jake went on: "Unless you are better armed than I am, we have a poor chance. But I have seen much accomplished by a determined resistance. As it's a choice between deaths, I'll resist. And if I can't shoot a devil or so, I'll strangle at least one before I lose my hold on life." He laughed to himself, giving DePew's hand a grip when he reached it out, saying:

"I'll resist too, Jake, for I have here what is dearer than life. Come! let us make our plans. You command. I'll obey every order but that which

might expose to danger my beloved wife," and DePew kissed Meg's hand tenderly, whispering to her a word of courage.

She needed cheer, for during these moments of excitement she had turned so pale that in the moonlight she looked as if carved of marble. She did not speak, however, did not move, simply listened to the plan between Jake and her husband, a plan whose end and aim was her protection. But what would her protection be if he were killed? He who made up the sum of her life! Her heart was bursting with the thought, while the two men were calmly discussing the situation and settling their arrangements. Jake's call to the interior of the coach as to what arms were held by the passengers, telling them it was possible they might meet a party of runaway Indians, elicited only groans from the men, cries from the women, and screams from children, who, not old enough to understand, yelled because of the general confusion.

"Hush, instantly! Quiet!" Jake commanded, "Or your noise will bring the savages upon you, whereas if they believe there is a party of men aboard, and not cowards, we may escape."

At these words the noises sank to confused moans and groans, which on the driver's further command, "Silence!" were finally stilled.

Then he learned that the only weapons inside the coach were one old rifle, a clasp-knife apiece to the men, and a pair of scissors belonging to a woman who called out with a sob, "I'll keep 'em. They're sharp enough to kill my chillern an' me ef the Injuns do come." Whereat the children set up a howl, and Meg in her tender heart prayed more earnestly than before.

"And you have a pistol and a knife," said Jake, looking at them as DePew held them out. "Not much against the good rifles the government provides for the agency. Still, they are better than nothing. Are you a good shot?" he asked.

"No," said DePew, "barely passable.

"Then," said Jake, "if you agree, I'll take the pistol, give you my knife," producing a long sharp knife which had been somewhere thrust in his boot, "and your clasp-knife give to your wife."

With trembling fingers Meg took the knife. Jake examined the pistol, thrust it in his breast, and DePew held his knife on the side furthest from his wife.

"Now, sir," said Jake, "the odds in our favor are, that the Indians have a superstition against attacking the United States Mail. They are natural cowards, and always like to see their enemy before fighting them. The leathers being all securely fastened, they can not see inside the coach, and if those fools will only keep still they may fancy soldiers are aboard. Then, too, they know me and my rifle. All these things considered, they may let us pass. But if not, I'll first shoot the horses, make a barricade of their bodies, fire every shot, kill as many as I can, and then rush out. Each man who dares will follow me, and perhaps by the sudden onslaught we can put the band to flight. If we fail, and are killed, the women must each take her own life. For those who believe in a hereafter, it is better to send their souls to their God than to trust their bodies to an Indian."

Jake had spoken in a matter-of-fact tone, keeping his eyes fixed on his horses, as one who simply stated facts, and placed them before his hearers as unavoidable necessities.

DePew recognized them as such, and though he caught his breath and clenched his teeth at the possibility of Meg's being forced to such a death, there was no alternative.

But Meg, gentle, trembling Meg, would not so take it.

"Husband, I can die. If it be God's will, I can submit to any fate. But I can not commit crime. I

can not take the life He has given me. It is His, to do with as He wills!"

Her voice hardly rose to a whisper, yet it reached Jake's ears. He turned sharply toward her as DePew put his arms about her, pressing her to his side.

"Not your life!" cried Jake. "Then sure, as you now live I'll take it and send your soul to a better place than an Indian's vile arms. I'll stand the crime, and think it a virtue. Would you not prefer it, sir?"

"Yes," said DePew.

And close to him Meg felt the shudder that shook his body as he spoke.

The moon was slowly sinking to rest as the coach came to a short steep hill before which, being a heavy pull, the horses were allowed to breathe, for they had traveled good thirty miles, and were nearing the end of their trip. During this moment's quiet, Jake said to DePew:

"At the foot of this hill is a deep creek. The willows about it would form an excellent ambuscade for the redskins. And atop of the hill that rises on the other side, stands the cabin of Dick Long. If the Indians are really on the war-path, they have probably murdered the Longs. They are a worthy family. He trying to make a ranch out here in the wilderness, and she bringing up her children the best she knows how. But what is this to Indians? Just because they are peaceable people, they will be killed and their cabin burned. We will see its embers on the rise. If we do, prepare! For once tasting blood the savages grow wild, and will not, probably, spare the mail. Therefore, we will expect them."

Then calling to the passengers inside:

"Silence! Remember your lives depend on it," Jake tightened the reins and the horses began the ascent.

On the summit he held them in, leaning forward trying to pierce the darkness with his great eyes, and with strained ears to glean something from the stillness. For, except the rushing of the waters, every thing was perfectly quiet, and, had the Indians destroyed the rancher's family, they must have spared the cabin; for not a glimmer of light was visible.

"They were seen about here. I can not understand," Jake muttered to himself, and then to DePew:

"We will dash on, sir, the sooner the suspense is ended the better. See to your wife!" with which words of caution he raised his whip, cut the horses fiercely, and, taking his foot off the brake, down rushed the team crowded on by the heavy stage. Through the water they dashed, sending it in showers up to Meg's face, and with the impetus gained, up they ran to the top of the other hill. Where, panting, Jake reined them in to speak to a woman who, with a baby on her breast, and with several little ones clinging to her, stood in the cabin door, holding a candle above her head. This peaceful picture after their terrible fears, brought a sob of gratitude from Meg's heart.

"Thank God!" she murmured. Her husband's solemn "Amen!" having in it more fervor than he had ever before experienced.

"I'm glad you are safe, Mrs. Long," Jake was saying.

"Yes, for this time," answered the woman. "I have been on the look-out for you, Jake. I thought you'd be anxious. Wasn't the road lonesome without a light? Curious Injuns should have changed their minds. They was jest a makin' fer this place, when, all of a suddent, they turned tail an' made fer the north. But we was ready fer 'em this time. The boys came down from t'other ranches, our goods were moved inter the cellar, and the rifles jest awaitin' to make them howl."

"Where are the men, now?" asked Jake.

"Four on 'em is a follerin', and t'other four is standin' guard, 'cause who ken tell if the snakes won't creep back agen."

"Perhaps they found out you were prepared," said Jake, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps so," answered the woman. "But I ain't too glad. Fer we was jest good an' ready fer once."

And she laughed, as if an Indian attack was a kind of joke, when one was "good and ready."

How strange the laugh sounded to Meg, whose nerves were yet a-throb with excitement. And just as strange the woman's parting words: "Good-by. I wish, Jake, yer could stay ter supper, we'se goin' ter hev roast pig."

How could she think of supper, when but so lately delivered from such danger? thought Meg, uttering fervent Te Deums in her grateful heart.

But Meg had not lived among the dangers of frontier life. She was only just entering upon the vicissitudes of these heroes of the desert who pass through such constant strains of nerve, growing by them into strong helpfulness and self protection. Perhaps if legislators were made to experience some of these hardships, these perils, measures of State protection, would be more effective and less tardy.

Long after the ranch of the Longs was left behind, and the lonely, silent plains, without one moving object, surrounded them, did Jake meditate on the strangeness of the Indians not having attacked the rancher's cabin.

"I have never known them to give up the pleasure of destroying a family, and though I suggested to Mrs. Long they might have been aware of their re-enforcements, I hardly believe it."

"Perhaps," said Meg, softly. "Perhaps God heard my prayers even though unworthy."

At these gentle words Jake burst into a bitter laugh. He stopped hurriedly and begged her pardon.

Begged her to forgive his rudeness; "But, he said, "I have seen and heard prayers prayed, when a heart of stone would be touched, yet no answers came. No, no; pretty as the illusion is, madam, it is but an illusion. The most probable solving of the mystery is, that the Indians were out of ammunition, and have only delayed the murder of the Longs."

Then, after a moment's silence, he turned again to Meg, and more humbly then he had yet spoken, said:

"Yet you may be right, madam, and I wrong. The mysteries your faith spans, the enigmas it solves, must ever be mysteries and enigmas to me. I trust you will always keep your faith, for without it, the heart grows bitter, and life almost unendurable. And I trust, also, that you have forgiven my rudeness. The laugh was not of enjoyment, I assure you; nor of ridicule."

"I have forgiven you," said Meg. "And I will pray for you," she added.

"Thank you, madam," Jake replied, not speaking again until the next station was reached, which was the end of his drive.

An hour after midnight they parted from him, the new driver being seated on the box when DePew and his wife came out from the station where they had gone for a cup of coffee and to warm by the fire.

On the ground, holding a lantern and waiting to see them off, Jake had grown diffident again.

"It is queer," he said, "how different I feel when I am down here, or up there. But in either place I'll remember you, sir, with the greatest pleasure I have known for years." He wrung DePew's hand, "And you, madam," with a bow to Meg.

"We will remember you, too, Jake," said DePew, "and our invitation to you. It holds good, does it not, Meg?"

"Yes! good! I have another reason now for wanting you to join us. I want to convert you."

This, with Meg's sweetest smile, was a very charming remark, and quite drove the gloom out of Jake's eyes.

He bowed, smiled, raised his hat to her as she climbed to the driver's box, looking almost handsome as he replied:

"If ever I am induced to leave this life, it will be by the hope of your success, madam."

Crack went the whip, off went the coach, the chill breeze bringing such sleepiness to Meg, that after several narrow escapes from tumbling off her elevated position, her husband proposed a change to the interior of the coach, which proposition being accepted by two of the stage passengers, sleepy Meg went inside, and with her head on DePew's breast, prepared herself for a cozy nap.

CHAPTER IV.

"HALT!"

AS comfortably placed as it was possible to be in the jogging coach, Meg could not sleep. The change from the outside air, which had been so soothing, to this close atmosphere, was stifling. And how some one was snoring! with such sudden snorts they set Meg's teeth on edge. Then the baby that she had noticed began to fret; so, after a little, softly withdrawing herself from DePew's arms, who himself was sound asleep, she struck a match and took a survey of her fellow-travelers.

In all sorts of awkward positions they slumbered, utterly regardless of the comical ugliness of their opened mouths. In one corner, with her children leaning on her, a great, fat, greasy-looking man lopping over her, crowding her with his weight, the tired mother was asleep. The only other wakeful passenger Meg found was the baby. The little fellow changed his fretting to crowing as he saw Meg's lighted taper, holding out his arms, when she coaxed him to her. She blew out the waxen taper, after having taken him and seeing the sleeping mother fall into a more comfortable position. And then, softly humming to Mr. Baby, and tenderly coddling him, she soon felt his little body rest warm on her breast, and caught his soft sleeping breath on her cheek.

On joggled the coach, louder snored the passengers. But they did not disturb DePew, nor the baby in Meg's arms. After awhile the snores

became indistinct, for Meg, leaning against DePew's shoulder, slept with the rest.

She was awakened by a sudden jolt, as the word "Halt!" was called in a clear voice, and the stage came to a stand-still.

"What's it?" "What's the matter?" "The Injuns!" "Oh, my baby!" were cried out simultaneously.

"Here is your baby, safe and well! I will keep him. Look after the others. Hush," Meg whispered, as she leaned toward the mother, "the road agents are here. Hide what you can—"

But before Meg could finish, or answer her husband's "Meg, are you all right?" a lantern was flashed through the open door of the stage, its light shining on a pistol leveled at the passengers by a masked man, who called:

"Out quick! Up with your hands! Who hesitates will be shot!"

The result was great consternation and instant obedience. The greasy-looking man who had been crowding the tired mother, being out among the first, shivering and moaning to himself. Meg, the woman with her children, and DePew, were the last in the line. The agent replied with a gruff "Hum!" to Meg's "We can't hold up our hands, we are holding children." And then saying to the mother, who had taken in her arms a child about three years, and was trying to quiet his crying, "Stop the brat's noise," moved off to the first of the long line of passengers with their hands high above their heads.

Quickly he searched every pocket, while two men with rifles pointed stood ready to fire at the slightest resistance. A fourth was at the horses' heads, and a fifth, wearing a long cloak that reached to his feet, was overhauling the mail-sack, tossing the valuable parcels on a blanket that had been spread upon the ground.

These five were the only ones visible, yet, so sur-

rounded was the spot by low sand hills, that a legion of robbers could be conveniently hidden.

Possibly it was this consideration that made the fifteen passengers quietly submit to be overhauled by the masked agent.

He was not finding much, however, and consequently was swearing to himself, when the agent with the cloak, having finished with the mail, came to his side, giving him the benefit of his lantern, as the greasy-looking man was reached. Protesting, groaning, imploring, he too had nearly been passed, when the small robber, so thoroughly cloaked that nothing of his figure was visible, said with a laugh:

"Off with his boots! The old reprobate has it—somewhere."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried the victim to this order, falling on his knees and imploring that his boots be not touched.

"Off with them, I say!" ordered the searcher, while the small robber at his side laughed heartily. "Off! or—" The robber raised his hand, click, click, went the two rifles, steadied for better aim, and immediately,

"Stop!" cried the unfortunate, "I gives up," while down on the ground, off came the boots; from which, on being shaken, there fell two rolls of greenbacks. "Oh! don't take it all! Not all! Jest leave me a little!" whined the robbed, the tears actually trickling down his dirty face, until the small agent, ceasing his laughter, called, "Up on your feet! or I'll have you stripped and searched." Up sprang the victim, so nimbly, that the other passengers laughed. Stoically submitting to being "gone through" without a comment, they had seen their watches, chains, gold rings and money tossed on the blankets. Any valueless article was returned with a graceful bow by the cloaked agent, who seemed the commander of the robbers. They

yielded to him, even at his command relinquishing a pocket-book that the mother of the baby Meg held, took from her bosom when the agent reached her.

"It's all I have," she said. "Take it if you are mean enough to rob a working woman."

"I guess we're working too," the agent replied, as he tossed the pocket-book to the blanket, but he of the cloak caught it in his hand.

"Allow me," he said, giving it back to its owner. "We are workers, and risk something, but we are not women and mothers."

The searcher moved, as if to expostulate, but when the other called "Next," he went on. He was not pleased, however, grumbling to himself as he obeyed. Meg caught the words, "Durned soft on women," and trembled a little, for her husband was the next, and then she came.

Her hand went up for her money, ready on the instant to surrender it. She was almost on the point of doing so now. Since DePew's appearance being so superior to those about him, the agent seemed determined to find something more than the few dollars taken from him; saying contemptuously:

"If such a 'toney chap' hasn't more than this, we might as well retire from the profession."

Again the passengers laughed. But Meg saw there was no amusement in her husband's eyes. He was biting away at his mustache, always with him a sign of impatience. Still, bound by his promise, he offered no resistance. Perhaps nothing he had ever done, so thoroughly proved his love for her, since for a brave, high-spirited man, his position was humiliating in the extreme.

When even his boots were shaken and nothing found, the searcher turned to the agent next him, whispering, "You see how it is! all risk and little gain. If you'd only let us take every thing."

"Pshaw! Don't be a miser! We've done pretty well," was the answer.

Low as both spoke, Meg heard the words. She saw too that the cloaked agent passed his hand through the other's arm, and led him away from where, with the sleeping baby on her breast, she had stood in trembling expectancy.

She caught the relieved expression on her husband's face, as the lantern's light flashed on it, and was thanking heaven in her grateful heart, when with a venom that made the other passengers hiss, the greasy man called out: "'Tain't fair. Women has no more right ter keep their money than men has. She ain't got no children! That baby ain't hern. P'raps if yer searched yer'd find the 'toney chap's' money on her. She's his wife."

"Is that your game? Loose me! quickly!" the searcher pulled away from the agent at his side. "Here, my beauty!" he reached for Meg's shoulder, her husband threw him back, and standing before his wife had nearly fallen dead at her feet—would surely have done so, but the cloaked agent, knowing what would follow, threw up in the air the well-aimed rifles.

"Bang! Bang!" Their balls flew out, and somewhere on the desert fell harmless; while with cloak thrown aside, and his slight person interposed between the husband and the robbers, whose rifles were again pointed at them, the agent called—

"Boys, this lady is a friend of mine. You can't touch her without killing me!"

There was a moment's hesitation—a moment when the robbed passengers seemed inclined in this emergency to rally around Meg with the wailing baby in her arms.

"Fools!" the agent who had protected the DePews turned to the passengers, "do you want all to be killed? Leave this to me." Then to the four robbers whose weapons still covered him,

"Friends, let us pass," he said; and drawing Meg's hand in his arm, he turned his back where two rifles and two pistols, in the hands of desperate men, threatened his life.

His life only; for he had whispered DePew, "Precede us," and Meg noticed that, though he held her hand in his arm, he so walked that she was covered by his body.

He placed her in the coach, saying to DePew, "You get in the stage. There are two fellows there savage as bloodhounds," adding, impatiently, as DePew hesitated, "Get in, unless you would have me shot." And then, when at Meg's imploring "Love, come!" DePew seated himself at her side, the agent finished, with a laugh, "I'd not be the first commander killed by his men." He was turning away, when DePew stopped him with the words—

"My name is Charles DePew. In protecting my wife you have placed me under an obligation I should like in some way to repay."

"Ah! Mr. DePew!" The agent bowed. "I am pleased to know your name, though, if you will excuse me, I'll not return the compliment. As for the obligation," laughing softly, "it is pleasant sometimes to be a creditor."

He stepped back, watched a moment when DePew stood up to help the woman with her children into comfortable seats, and flashing his lantern on Meg's face, caught her eyes, lifted his mask so she alone could see him, and, laughing, blew a kiss to her.

At her amazed "Oh!" her husband turned.

"Charles," she whispered, "he is the boy of the supper station. See!"

But, though DePew looked quickly, the cloaked figure had already disappeared.

With the other robbers, he seemed to have sunk somewhere behind the sand hills. For the retaking of their seats and helping in the women and children could not have occupied more than five moments of

time, yet robbers and plunder had all vanished, the stage-coach and its passengers having the desert to themselves.

"We'd as well start," said the driver; and the passengers showed their assent by hurrying into the coach. There were a few moments' general conversation, from which, however, the greasy man was excluded.

"We want nothin' to do with a blabber on women," said one of the passengers. To this sentiment the others heartily responding, 'the whining fellow had to retire into a corner and groan to himself.

He kept on groaning until Rapid City was reached, where breakfast being prepared, and an hour's rest allowed, Meg had an opportunity to look at the few poor houses that, calling themselves by such an ambitious name, were huddled together as closely as possible, as if fearful of the mighty desert on whose borders they were established.

CHAPTER V.

"HO! FOR DEADWOOD!"

MORN was just tipping with her rosy fingers the gray of the sky when Meg climbed to the seat on the driver's box and looked ahead on the road they were to travel.

Far in the distance a dark line marked the mountains, whose heavy timbers of cedar and pine had given them their name, The Black Hills.

"Almost there, dear," she said to DePew, and her smile was bright as the day. She was light of heart, for the woman with the children had found a friend with the landlady of the station. She had whispered to Meg when she kissed the baby good-by —

"I'm in luck, miss. I've been offered the place of cook. Fifty dollars a month, and children no objection. Then, too, my husband's working in this camp. The keeper of the station knows him. He deserted us, but women is scarce here, and perhaps he'll come up to time. If he don't, I'll not break my heart, for I can support my children and lay by money."

To Meg it was a pitiful tale compressed in a few words. But Meg was too tender. The woman herself saw only the bright side of it, and so, after a little, Meg's pity changed to congratulation.

"I am glad you are contented," she said.

"That I am!" the woman answered.

So Meg, starting on her journey, felt all the lighter of heart that the baby and its mother had found a home.

The country grew more beautiful as they ad-

vanced. Surrounded with pretty mosses and ferns, springs bubbled up. Little streams glistened in the sunlight, between groves of birch and willow; and nearing the hills the various trees with lighter foliage brightened the darkness of the evergreens.

Once among the hills, Meg was enraptured by the wonderful variety of wild flowers that sent up their rich perfume as the stage passed under the great boughs of pines arching overhead.

"This is a paradise!" she exclaimed. But soon the pretty rills and clear streams lost their beauty, running red and thick with the dirt which man's greed and industry sent piling up in little hills, burying the flowers, disfiguring the land, as they washed out their gold.

Turning into Deadwood Gulch the driver became animated, pointing out there a hole where men had taken out a cool ten thousand; here a claim where three partners had found enough to buy five thousand head of cattle; and "Look!" he cried, "look at that cabin," pointing to a low, blackened log-building that Meg had imagined might have been used as a pig-sty; "Out o' thet cabin Jim and Ned walked carrying from the country one hundred thousand thet they'd found right thar." He waved his hand across a piece of dark earth that was fairly honeycombed with holes; earth pitched into heaps that with its lonely cabin looked like a field of desolation, and not a gold mine.

"And yet I suppose flowers once bloomed here!" said Meg.

But no one heard her, not even her husband. He had caught the gold fever; caught it from the busy workers toiling in the gulch; caught it from the tents pitched on the mountain side; from the very teamsters, cracking their whips and trying to outstrip each other in hastening toward the center of this gold excitement.

Deadwood itself was a beehive of industry. The

Chinamen, who find their way everywhere, were here in droves, all busily working at the placers. The very streets of the town were dug up by the eager searchers for gold. And the wagons crowded so thick together that the stage, with the United States Mail and all the passengers, had to wait in patience until after considerable and renewed effort the heavily-laden teams were sufficiently advanced to permit it to draw up before the hotel.

Bands were outplaying each other, horsemen and horsewomen, too, were threading their way through the crowded street, as helped down by her husband, for a bewildered moment, Meg looked about her. It was a relief when a white jacketed darkey snatched their satchels from under the feet of the pedestrians with a polite:

"Jest follow me!" pointing to the open door of the frame building that had been hastily put up for the "leading hotel."

To follow the ebony gentleman was the only possible thing to do, for the throng on the sidewalk, stopping to gaze on a woman, she was very well pleased to seek a shelter.

"Did you ever see so many people?" she said to her husband, who had accompanied her to the small upper room used as a "hotel parlor." "It seems to me as if all the world were crowded into this gulch. And listen to the bands. Why, Charles, there must be a circus in town!"

"Not a circus, my girl, but gambling saloons!" Those bands help to allure idlers in to lose their wits and their money. They are the curses of mining towns! See! we have one just opposite." Then he left her to arrange for rooms. Out on the balcony Meg saw several of these saloons ornamented with mirrors, while gayly played the bands, and into them poured men, and even boys.

No longer pleased with the crashing music, she looked sadly down on the thronged streets. Shud-

dering, when with hair streaming in the wind, with young faces daubed with paint, some girls rode by, her womanhood blushing and mourning for her fallen sisters.

"And only children!" she said to herself. With tears in her heart, she re-entered the small parlor and met her husband. He was coming for her accompanied by the polite darkey who, smiling from ear to ear, informed her that "De lady's apartmen' am jest ready, an' de dinner ain't quite frough."

The apartment consisted of one room, so small that when their modest trunk was stored away in it there was not space for both DePew and Meg to stand on the fraction of floor left by the bed and washstand.

But they very soon accommodated themselves to this, for who objects to be crowded by one he loves? The apparent discomforts of their tiny chamber were cause for mirth to these two who were so mutually dear.

"Remember, Meg, the partitions are only of sheeting," DePew said warningly, as they grew merry together.

His warning anticipated the voices of the other guests of the hotel, who, less loving and more careless, quarreled their quarrels, and had their discussions, regardless of their neighbors' ears.

In a few days DePew had hung out his shingle, and regularly commenced the practice of the law. But unaccustomed to mining camps and mining sharks, he believed all the rough fellows who came for advice were honest.

He believed, too, that his fees were in no danger; so, while he was continually busy, he made little or no money; for when the cases were tried clients had either, in mining parlance, "Skipped the camp," or pleading poverty, begged for time.

The law practice in Deadwood was a different matter from the same business in New York, where

the clients of Charles M. DePew were among the most prominent citizens. There young DePew had been reckoned a sharp shrewd fellow, sure of making his way. He had thought this of himself, and was now rather taken aback when at the end of a month of constant occupation, he found his capital considerably dwindled, and was unable to collect any of the several outstanding debts.

Still he was not discouraged, being by nature buoyant and self confident.

"Besides, they've not all been rogues," he said to Meg, when seated side by side on the edge of the bed in their tiny apartment, for which they paid such high rates. "There's Oliver! Nothing could be more fair than his plain statement at the outset, that he had no money, but if I'd take the case and win it, I should have half. Coming with the deed too, all drawn up and acknowledged. He is a regular old trump, and we'll win, Meg, I am sure of it. Then my girl you'd be a rich woman. By the by, I think you'll better not wait for the fortune before buying something pretty. There's a dear, go and get a silk. Keep up your appearance with the rest of the women."

But on this Meg was obstinate. The month which for her husband had been passed in unprofitable business had not been an unpleasant month to her. For while she had suffered and blushed at the sights of the streets, she had made some pleasant acquaintances among the wives and daughters of those whose adventurous spirits had brought them to Deadwood. Her husband's profession, and her own appearance commending her, the fashionables of Deadwood had called upon Meg, taking her into their set. If any one should doubt the existence of fashion in this remote camp, he should see the numbers of elegantly attired women who sent in their cards to "Mrs. DePew," as they made the parlor of the hotel fairly blaze with their diamonds.

It was not their jewels nor their costumes that attracted Meg; but that each and all, had some history whose romance added its interest to her. One coming to the camp, had been captured by the Indians, and rescued, just in time to save her life. Another to join her husband had traveled the whole distance alone; another had helped him make his fortune, and so on until Meg felt herself surrounded by heroines, whose adventures would fill a library.

Of her own adventures she did not speak. Did not even tell of the gallant road agents, nor of the friends she had made. That she was modest, rarely spoke of herself, and was at all times more ready to listen than to talk, commended her to the ladies. Some of them actually feeling sufficient interest in her to urge her, that now was her time to make her husband buy jewels for her. And thus that much might be saved from the rapid losses that generally follow upon the quick gains of the mining camps.

But Meg only shook her pretty head as she thanked them for their kindness. "I do not care for jewels," she said, "besides since I see money so lavishly spent and so woefully wasted, it does not seem of such value, and for one, I do not care to be rich." So her visitors had called her a "dear little goose," had invited her to a "woman's picnic," and had left her at the window watching them, as they entered their carriages and drove away.

Had left her where she had taken many a sad lesson of life, and preached to her own heart many a touching sermon, on the worthlessness of the money men strive so hard to gain. Where she had shed tears too, as she knew the feverish desire for wealth was upon her beloved husband, who would now never be content with less than a fortune.

Many a time, as alone she stood by this window, had those fair young girls with painted cheeks and bared throats ridden by. Riding to their own

misery more surely and more rapidly than to the goal of their race to which they cheered each other, and were "hallooed" on by the men watching and applauding them on the main street of Deadwood. And from that window had she looked upon the gamblers, who wasted in an hour what had taken weeks, months to gain, wasted more than their money, wasted life and manhood. "If it were not for money, those boys might have remained at home with their mothers, those men not have wandered away from their families," Meg would think, as sometimes a man, sometimes a boy, went into the saloon to trust his all to a turn of the roulette.

Therefore when DePew told his wife that instead of making money in Deadwood, thus far, he had lost, Meg did not feel any grief over it, nor any elation at the great prospect DePew saw in Old Oliver's Mine.

But at his desire that she should make herself fine, she became most decided.

"No, love, that I will not do; the fashionables have seen me as I am, and you will have to continue to endure me unimproved," she said with so sweet a smile that had DePew been her lover he would certainly have declared she was perfect as she was. Being a husband, he probably felt it, but contented himself with saying he "Was satisfied with Mrs. DePew."

At which assertion, Mrs. DePew ventured to raise her voice in the family conclave, and argued her point so cleverly and effectively, that finally her husband, after many objections, promised to think of it.

Meg's plan was a sensible one, showing that her young head had not lost its ability to calculate ways and means. And to this wise little head it seemed great extravagance that they should be boarding at a hotel where the prices were in keeping with all the

other rates in the successful camp, while DePew was paying an equally high rent for the small house that he had secured for his office, and which had two tiny but comfortable rooms that were unused and had not thus far been rented.

"I would be much happier there near you than here, where the parlor window possesses a fascination for me that invariably results in pain," said Meg.

"Well, I'll think of it, Meg," replied DePew, as he went to his office, leaving his wife at the window, while the bands played gayly and the lights of the opposite saloons shone out in the soft twilight.

CHAPTER VI.

"DEPEW'S CLIENT."

THE evening was warm, the saloon crowded, and the people still pressing in; the screen, that generally shielded the interior was pushed aside, and Meg took her first look into a gambling saloon.

She started, exclaiming, "Is it possible!" when at a long table she saw a woman presiding.

From face to face she looked with shuddering fascination. Her eyes rested longest on the young face of a boy who, evidently losing, grew desperate. She saw him watch the roulette; saw him pull from his pocket a pistol, heard the sharp report, and then when white and dead they carried him out,

"His soul! his soul!" she cried, and sank fainting to the floor.

Her husband found her thus. Lifting her tenderly, she came to consciousness in his arms.

How the bands played on! To her they seemed fierce voices calling out for men's souls.

"Charles, darling," she pleaded, when she had described what had made her ill, "take me away from this place. First I asked it for economy's sake, now it is for my peace. I beg you let me stay with you and be away from these terrible scenes."

So the next morning DePew bought the necessaries for modest housekeeping, and Meg made a home out of the tiny rooms back of the office, where, when busied with clients, she could still hear her husband's voice, know she was near him.

Occupation was a help to her. It was a help, too, to know that each day there was a saving of more

than half of their former expenses. This saving was now very opportune for DePew. His clients were not many, and though he had grown more careful in collecting fees they did not add any great sum to his capital. Unknown among mining men, he had to make his reputation in some great suit before wealthy companies would employ him. He expected to do this when the important case of the "Bullfinch" came on, and so he spared neither money nor time, riding over the country, collecting testimony, securing witnesses, overcoming the many difficulties that lay between a just cause and a fair decision.

"I'll bring Oliver in to see you, Meg, when he comes to-morrow," DePew had said one evening, and the next day, throwing open the door that led from the office to the small room used as bedroom and sitting-room, he called:

"Meg!"

She came from the little kitchen, where the fire having given additional color to her cheeks and brilliancy to her eyes, she appeared a marvel of beauty to the tall, lank old fellow, who, with hat on the back of his head and weather-beaten face, looked more like pictures of the lone fisherman than a miner, as Meg had imagined him. There was a benevolence in his eyes, a kindness about the whole rough figure that rather surprised Meg, to whom DePew had told of some of Oliver's daring in defense of his mine.

"How-de-doo! How-de-doo!" he replied to Meg's greeting, chuckling to himself when she called him "Mr. Oliver," and turning the quid of tobacco that had stuck out one cheek, as an epicure might a choice tid-bit:

"Ain't much used ter bein' mistered," he said, holding out to her a hand rough and hard as horn, chuckling again, when finding it impossible to take the whole stiff member, Meg compromised by clasping two of the immovable fingers, while with head

on one side and eyes screwed up, as a sailor when seeing a new craft, he looked steadily at her.

"Ain't much used ter it! No, I ain't. But the women allers hes ter hev their way. Eh, Charley?" giving DePew a prodigious nudge with his elbow, as he laughed outright.

Suddenly checking the laugh, as if he believed himself guilty of some breach of decorum, he inquired in the gravest manner for Meg's health. At which she laughed so merrily, and Oliver's mouth spread out to such an extent, that Meg was in terror lest he should lose that great piece of tobacco, as the long wrinkles formed three deep in his cheeks.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he shouted, winding up his laugh with another lunge at DePew with his elbow, and the words, "Charley, she do look good-natured fer a woman—fer a woman."

Meg laughed at this. Oliver at once felt himself sufficiently at home to move further back on the chair, of which, when she had placed it for him, he had occupied only the edge, doubling up his long legs into awkward angles to keep his balance.

"Ha! ha! Even old Oliver knows when he meets a lady," he said. Pulling another chair for his arms to rest on, and another for his feet, he made himself quite comfortable. The neat little cuspidor Meg placed for his convenience he eyed suspiciously. But after saying politely "Thankee, ma'am, thankee," took the greatest care to avoid it, as with force and precision he marked up Meg's clean floor with the juice of the pernicious weed that filled his mouth. He was so thoroughly enjoying himself, as thus with his long body spread over the chairs he talked to DePew, occasionally nodding toward Meg, that she would not embarrass him by calling attention to the uses for which cuspidores were intended.

And, having put from her thoughts the annoyance

all housekeepers would feel, was astonished at the force and intelligence with which Oliver stated the pros and cons of his case. "Hurry up the bizness, Charley," he said, after the matter had been discussed between them. "Jest hurry it up, fer I hes reasons ter b'lieve them fellers is on my ground. I'm runnin' a tunnel ter meet 'em, an' s'help me Gord, ef thar's a foot taken out o' my rock, thar'll be murder done."

In his excitement he sprang to his feet, very tall and lank, with upraised hand, and small eyes glittering under overhanging eyebrows, he was not one to be trifled with.

All Meg's pleasure and amusement vanished as she looked at him. "More blood!" she thought. "Oh, this fearful money," and then aloud, with entreaty in voice and face, "Mr. Oliver, I pray you don't kill a man just for a little gold! Whoever robs you injures himself more than he can injure you. And, O, what is money to an immortal soul?"

"Well, ma'am," old Oliver said seriously, "I don't know much about souls. I hes seen such mean doin's most of my life, that I begins ter think a man's soul must be a tarnal small affair ef it has any thin' ter do with him. As fer money, I take it thet my money's wuth my life, leastways I'll risk my life ter pertect it. Jest as I'd risk my life ter pertect any right. So, Charley, jest you hurry on the case."

The old man had grown too excited to stay indoors. "No, thankee. No, thankee," he said, in answer to Meg's invitation to dinner. "I can't set quiet an' think them fellers is a runnin' on my ground. Fer, while I don't know much about souls, ma'am, jest the thought o' them robbin' me makes my blood bile so hot that I'd bust ef I sot in a room. It takes the hull mountain side fer me ter breathe in when I feels this way."

With which words he made his bow, walking up the road toward his mine with long strides, that soon carried him out of sight.

DePew did his best to hurry up the case, being in court with witnesses already waiting for the trial. But law and judges are tedious, and very hard to move when might opposes right. So that the defendants gained a delay, and Oliver left the court-room, swearing both "deep and loud" against the influence of money. The "Bullfinch" ledge became one of the engrossing topics of Deadwood, and many a good joke was cracked over "Ole Oliver holdin' out above, while them other fellers is takin' it out below." For it was very generally suspected that the defendants wanted time for robbery, and having gained it, would continue undermining the "Bullfinch."

No outsider was allowed in their workings of the grounds that adjoined Oliver's, therefore all was hearsay. And as the miners employed by the "Stillwater" Company were ready to swear that their employers were on their own ground, when DePew prayed for an injunction to prevent the working of the contested portion, he had been opposed by many witnesses and much testimony. The order to have the ground examined, was, upon one technicality or another, so delayed that Oliver boldly asserted, and DePew believed, that the officer had been bought over by the defendants, who had both power and wealth. Meanwhile Oliver, rendered desperate, worked night and day at his tunnel, and DePew, heart and soul in the case, not only gave the most of his time to it, but finding his old client without money, and with very little "grub," lessened his dwindling capital by providing him what he needed.

"We're in it, and will win. Together enjoying the profits, and together sharing the trials," he said, when driving Meg out to the "Bullfinch," with a

load of provisions, powder, and fuse, they had called Oliver from the tunnel where he was at work.

He came into the daylight his face streaked with the soft red dust, that covered his overalls, shirt, even his beard. For a moment or so he seemed to be staggered by the sight of the things DePew had brought. Turning his back to them, and wiping his eyes with his hands as he felt the tears rise to them, for he had had a hard life, he had found people ready to rob him, and was touched by this unexpected kindness.

Seeing the old man's emotion, DePew's generous nature spoke. "Yes, Oliver, we are partners. You should have told me how low your grub was. I did not know it until yesterday. Come, man, take my hand, or you will have my wife thinking that you are growing savage with me," said DePew, as old Oliver still kept his back to them.

"Savage with yer! Lord! Yu is the only friend I has ever found!" exclaimed Oliver.

The tears were running down his cheeks when he faced about and gripped the hand DePew extended, and then with a laugh of delight he grasped a powder keg, hugging it to his breast.

"*This* is what I wanted. *This* is what I couldn't git on without. Ah, Charley, my old body warn't a needin' grub, but down thar in the tunnel I was nigh to cryin' when I knowed the powder hed most giv' out, and I'd not a derned cent to buy more."

Then seeing Meg's face, which in its tender beauty always showed her heart, Oliver chuckled as he wiped his eyes, gleaming sharper than ever just as if his tears had washed away any weakness or softness.

"Yer see, ma'am," he said, "a mine is somethin' a feller's heart hangs ter, jest—jest as if it war a woman. 'Tain't only thet it brings a power o' money. No, 'tain't that. For though money's convenient, eh, Charley!" with a twinkle of his eyes, "'specially whar thar's likely ter be a family, yet 'tain't all

money. It's the time, patience, intelligence an' ambition of a feller. It's success, ma'am, it's hope, it's everythin'. Now what ken money do fer me?" He straightened up as he looked at her. "It can't make me young an' han'some. It can't win love fer me. An' as fer luxuries, a log cabin like that, a piece o' 'backy an' a pipe, is all the luxuries I finds use fer. Yet as I stan's here, a-lookin' at that purty sky, a-seein' them mountains, and knowin' that I hes arter all foun' one true man in Charley, as I stan's here, feelin' this world's good enough fer me, an' not bein' one bit anxious ter git ter t'other, whar I ain't acquainted, I swars I'd hold my life less'n nothin' against the possession o' every foot o' the Bullfinch ground! No, ma'am! It ain't jest fer money! It's fer *right!* An' I'm derned ef I ain't too good a Yankee not to stick up fer *my* rights."

His voice strong and deep, his eyes glistening and brightening, and his long arm waving, roused Meg's enthusiasm.

Standing on the mountain side near the poor little log-cabin where he had wintered, summered, suffered privations, and all for the ledge that was being robbed from him; even gentle Meg felt her heart stir. Felt herself capable of fighting for him and for his rights.

"Come down the incline and jest look at the rock," he said. Holding a candle above his head he preceded them as they walked down the incline; stopping every now and then to brush away the dust that Meg might see the glitter of the gold.

"Yer see, ma'am, it's a-walkin' through snows a-goin' empty an' dry, a-hopin' an' a-dreamin', till we grows old and worn. An' then, when arter all, yer strikes it! D' yer think, even you, with all yer soul bizness, 'ud give it up?"

He looked eagerly in her face as he held the candle near her. And when she hesitated, caught her hand, nearly crushing it in his hard one.

"No, yer wouldn't!" he shouted. "Yer wouldn't! God bless yer. Yer wouldn't! Oh, Charley!" lunging at him with his elbow, "yer hes done well. She ain't so bad fer a woman. Not so bad."

They went to the very end where Oliver was working, he talking eagerly all the way, telling how between his blows he believed he heard others. That he felt sure he would come upon the thieves. "An' then let 'em look out. Fer tho' this arm is nigh ter sixty, it's good an' strong, an' the rifle knows me so well it ain't never e'en missed a mark. I guess I'm ekal ter 'em. I calkerlate I am. Tho' ter day, when I stood here a-workin', my heart felt like lead, fer I looks at the powder can an' knowed thar warn't enough for three more shots. Now jest see me! I'se grow'd young! It's hope, ma'am, it's hope as makes us fergit."

In the light of the setting sun he stood at his tunnel's mouth, waving his long arms to Meg and DePew as they rode away from the Bullfinch, down the gulch to Deadwood.

The hill-sides were bright with camp fires, where, near their tents, men cooked their evening meal, their dark figures weird and uncanny as they bended over the flame.

"They look like magicians conjuring spells," Meg said, and then she thought of Oliver; of his years of labor and wearisome searching, of his disappointments, hopes; and when at last there came fruition, of this cruel, unjust attempt, to wrest from his old hands their hard-won prize.

"I wonder," she thought, as the camp fires and the moving figures had new interest for her, "I wonder if all of them are like Mr. Oliver?"

They drove into the town where lights were flashing, bands playing, stores ablaze, as in the cities at Christmas-tide. Stores with rich goods equal to any metropolis, for there must be nothing lacking to tempt the extravagance, the self-indulgence of man.

It was a life of to-day. No future was thought of, none prepared for, by the majority of those who recklessly threw away the gold gained by fatigue, won at great risks.

To-morrow! There seemed no to-morrow to the busy, noisy town that filled the long gulch, to which the dead timber lying convenient for building, had given its name and determined its location.

Even to their modest quarters the scene of hurry penetrated. DePew internally fretting over the delay of his suit, and Meg anxious that Oliver should soon have his rights, neither was peaceful, nor entirely content.

"Yet," she said, leaning her head on her husband's shoulder, while they sat before the fire, "yet, if we would but put money out of our minds, if we would but go to some tranquil spot, how happy we could be, just as we are! We are both young, both healthy, and both loving."

"It is true, Meg," and her husband put his arm about her, holding her to his heart. "True, every word of it. But such is man! With his happiness thus in his embrace, he still desires more. Risking what he has for the gain of the unnecessary! Dear as you are, tempting as a life of tranquillity may be, I could not go to it. At least not until I have made what I came here to make—a fortune. Oliver hit it when he said it was not money only. It is success! My life and pride are bound up in it."

His eyes shone, his face was full of purpose, as thus close together, he looked into the fire and dreamed; while she, loving him, prayed in her pure heart for the success he desired.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE WOMAN'S PICNIC."

IT was rather a bold idea of Deadwood's fashionables, in a town whose women were at such a premium, and men in superabundance, to give a fete for women only.

"It's entirely a one-sided affair," said some of the men, when across Main Street, down one of the beautiful cañons, passed the procession of women, arrayed for a day in the woods.

Yet such was the respect shown for the sex that no one followed; not even a voice was raised by the rough-looking fellows, as the women, all young and most of them pretty, turned away from the town. The Eastern towns, with all their civilization and culture, could hardly boast an equal courtesy; their crowds would hardly have maintained a silence equally respectful. There is something about this Western life, whether it is that its toilers live in their dreams and memories, or that the very working in and nearness to the earth, engenders reverence; there is in it something which makes the most dissipated man hold a modest woman in highest honor. In no city is she as safe, and nowhere on the face of the earth would an injury to such be so immediately and relentlessly punished.

It is probable the fashionable young women who had taken Meg into their set, knew this. Knew, too, that Deadwood, with its men, was a protection against any wandering Indians. For they ventured boldly along the pathless gulch with its beautiful ferns, mosses, wild flowers, and trickling stream, up

to the mountain side, whose trees bore golden leaves, now that October's frost had kissed them. On they climbed, until under the shade of pines, they could look far off across lower hills, to the great plains bounding this wooded district. Then, seating themselves, they discussed their adventures, their lunch, and their husbands, all but Meg protesting that it was the extremest cruelty of man to bring a woman to this dull place, at such a distance from the excitement and variety of city life.

And when, at this, Meg's silence broke out into a musical laugh, a fashionable woman heard her, turned sharply, asking:

"How is it with you, Mrs. DePew? You surely can not endure this existence. Why, do you know, that with your golden hair and remarkable eyes, you would, in a city, soon become noted for beauty? While here!"

The pretty speaker gave a shrug and contemptuous toss of her head, that, finishing her sentence, showed plainly her opinion of Deadwood and its society.

"Is it so pleasant to be noted?" Meg asked, archly. "I can not tell, for I have never been of much consequence to any one, but my husband." Then more seriously, "Nor do I wish to be. Besides," with a charming smile, "is not beauty a matter of opinion? To me it seems a gift like a flower, which comes up because God calls it, to delight the eyes of the world. What a foolish flower to feel vanity or desire praise, because of something for which it is irresponsible! As for variety and excitement, they are, for me, the very faults of Deadwood. And adventure! Why, is not this an adventure? That we, alone, unprotected, dare come at this distance from the camp? That here in freedom, we breathe the air of a world, almost alone!

Rarely did Meg's tongue outstrip her timidity. But to-day the lovely wild flowers, the bright sky,

the trees, mountains, all that make the world beautiful, had sunk into her silent heart so deep, that when these very pretty women whom she rather admired, had begun to rail at Deadwood, she had risen in indignant protest. It was a very charming indignation, too gentle to offend, and only provoking laughter among the picnic party. They laughed on, until Meg's cheeks were scarlet with hot blushes, seeing which her neighbor, who was the foremost of the party, patted her hand and called her "an enthusiast. It is a very pretty quality, however, since it gives you such roses. But it will not carry you through difficulties, teach you to manage your husband, or brave dangers," said the lady.

"How can you tell that?" At this strange voice, and the stranger figure that leaning against a tree looked down on them, the ladies started in affright, some clinging to their neighbors, some springing to their feet, and one, more agile than the others, starting to run, while with great variety of tone and power of lungs, a volume of screams rent the air.

"Stop!" cried the intruder, bringing a would-be Atalanta to a stand-still. "I'll have no run-aways from this camp. I'm a woman! What are you afraid of? You wanted excitement, I've given it to you, and as for society, why here's Calamity Jane."

She came forward as she spoke, the straight plain skirt and long black hair making her look more Indian than white.

Her dark skin kept up the resemblance to the aborigines, but there it ended, for her features were delicately pretty, and her blue eyes gave a strange expression to her face.

"Now," she said, "as this is a woman's picnic I suppose you can't object to me. At any rate, object or not, I'm here, and," with determination, "I intend to be treated civilly. You are very pretty." She looked around upon the ladies, who in their fright, really

made pretty groups. "If I were a man any one of you would manage me as easily as a bear with a ring in its nose. As it is, I intend to manage you. Twenty!" Leaning on her rifle she counted them. "Twenty," laughing heartily, she tossed the broad hat on the back of her head, still laughing as she glanced from face to face. The laugh coming from a pretty mouth, showing nice white teeth, was not unlovely as it rang out clear and hearty. So hearty that Meg, who was nearest her, and who, while equally frightened with the others, had that quality of mind which scorns cowardice, could not help but laugh too.

It did seem a very funny thing that twenty active, able-bodied young women should be terrified at the appearance of one other woman, who, however strange her costume might be, with its mannish jacket and powder horn slung over her shoulder, certainly had no intentions of violence. Just now she seemed to feel nothing but amusement, for still leaning on the rifle she was convulsed with laughter. Winking at Meg in the most fun-provoking way, when Meg's laugh rang out with hers.

"Funny isn't it, little one," she said to Meg, "you're not so frightened as the rest, so perhaps you'll ask me to eat out of your basket. Perhaps you ladies don't know what it is to wander over these hills for hours and not get a shot at any game?" She looked at the others while Meg, spreading a napkin on the ground, was trying to make appetizing the remnants of her lunch.

She had heard of Calamity Jane whose eccentricities were so numerous and daring, so remarkable, that she was suspected to be in every deviltry from robbing trains to playing faro. The ladies who now looked askance at the stranger, had told Meg what they knew of this character of romance. Had wished too to see her, yet when that wish was gratified, they were like the ghost-seers who would rather talk of, than to, the unsubstantial spirits which inter-

est them. But Calamity Jane was a spirit that would talk and be answered too. Commencing: "Now ladies," and as their terror abated, the ladies noticed what a pleasant voice was Calamity Jane's, "I'll make a bargain with you. I know you have money about you. I see the jewels in your ears, but if each of you will clip me a lock of your hair, I'll take nothing else from you, eat what I need, and departing, leave you all in peace! If you do not agree, I'll——" She tapped her rifle, frowned, and then when her threatening action had drawn forth a shout of "We agree, we agree!" politely handed out a pair of scissors, taking each lock from its donor and counting them as she dropped them in her pocket. Then she laughed long and heartily, and then with a graceful bow said: "Thanks, ladies!"

Afterward she turned to Meg, toward whom, during this compact, she had not looked. But Meg, on her knees, having done the best she could with her little feast, had been very attentively observing Calamity Jane.

Something about the woman was strangely familiar to her. Something in the voice, the free graceful motions of her body. Yet she had never to her knowledge seen any one that resembled this dark face with its blue eyes, that seemed nearer to merriment than wickedness.

As Jane doffed her hat with the one word "Thanks," to the ladies, Meg uttered an "Ah!" of recognition. But when she turned, looking steadily down on her, the recognition vanished and only puzzling doubt remained.

"So you are the enthusiast!" said Calamity Jane, her rifle across her knees, as she sat beside the lunch Meg had spread for her. There was a tender inflection to her voice, a brightness in her eyes that made Meg believe this strange woman whose age seemed about her own, and whose build for all her wild life was so delicate, felt an interest in her. It was sin-

gular that it was so, yet she knew it by one of those magnetic communications that are inexplicable.

"Thank you," was Meg's involuntary exclamation, as the woman kept on her those remarkable eyes, full of tenderness.

"No! I thank you!" said Calamity, and strange as it seemed, Meg was sure there were tears in her eyes, as she went on, "you are not afraid of me, yet *you* told no adventures, and were not seeking to manage your husband, nor complaining of him as were those others! You are of different stuff. You do not show off as heroine."

She put out her hand as if to touch Meg's, that were folded together on her lap. Then suddenly seeming to remember there were twenty pairs of eyes looking at her, she turned her face away from Meg's sweet one, glancing at the ladies, who a little distance off, whispered together.

"Ladies," she said, "pray talk aloud." And then as at her word they became silent, Calamity sent out another shout of merriment. "Ha! Ha! You've no idea how I tiptoed along when I saw so many of my sex picnicking together. Thinks I, if I've had no shots, here's game in a flock, and I'll capture, at least, their thoughts. I had the greatest curiosity to know what you were talking about. For though a woman, I've been so little with my sex that they always seem like birds, whose beauty lies in their plumage. It's rarely one finds out any thing about *their* hearts."

Her lip curled scornfully, then her face softened, and the strange eyes looked on Meg as she finished.

"Except for enthusiasts, this lady included, we who have the rough-and-tumble fights of life, might doubt that woman, lovely woman, has a heart." She laughed again, sprang to her feet, tossing up her rifle, and catching it, as boys do, when full of exuberant spirits.

"Thanks," she said to Meg, who, covering up the

lunch from the criticism of her companion, had noted that whatever Calamity wanted, it was not the food, which she had barely touched.

"Farewell, I'm off—" Calamity gave another sweeping bow that was as full of grace and spirit as was every thing she did. She walked a step or so, and then, as the ladies were quickly gathering up their baskets, wheeled around, and again leaned on her rifle as she looked at them, saying:

"There must be something fascinating about fashionable women, for even I can not tear myself away. One of you walk with me a little distance. This I don't force upon you, but entreat of you."

She glanced at each, letting her eyes rest last on Meg, upon whom those strange eyes had such power, that as none of the others spoke, Meg timidly said:

"I—I will walk a little way with you, if the ladies will wait for me here. Will you?"

Which gentle request, supplemented by Calamity's rather fierce, "Ladies, you will wait, I am sure you will wait," brought forth a decided "We will."

"Come then, since you are not afraid of one who would not harm you." Saying these words Calamity, with Meg, walked away from the grove of pines on to the bare rocks, and when about fifty feet distant from the ladies, stopped.

"Meg DePew!" Meg started when Calamity called her name, repeating it softly as if the sounds were pleasant to her, as with tender eyes, she looked into Meg's startled ones.

"Meg DePew, do you suppose I came here to see them? No, except to amuse me, what interest can they have for a woman, a vagabond like Calamity Jane. I who wander foot-sore, grow desperate, commit crimes. I have no fancy for *dolls*. But when a woman sweet and pure looks into my face, my soul cries, Thus mightst thou have been if—if—" Her voice choked in her throat, her whole body shook, but not with laughter, as straining her rifle to her

side, she turned her face away. "Ah!" Meg's gentle pity swelled her breast, sending its dew into her eyes. She had heard that this woman was wicked, she knew she was notorious; but when in this outburst, her nature cried aloud, Meg saw only that she was a woman, like herself!

"Jane," she said softly, "the greatest saint was once the greatest sinner. Not that I stand in judgment on you, only this, that if you have done wrong, God will pardon, will love you, if only you repent."

"God! Yes," with a shrug of her shoulders, "God may; but where does He live? Where is the place He provides for such as *I am?* If I repent, where could I go? My pards would cast me forth, and where is the home that would open for Calamity Jane?"

She turned her face on Meg, the eyes still swimming, tears still hanging on her lashes, and slowly trickling down her cheeks, but her mouth was smiling as if the comicality of repentance had overpowered other feeling.

The smile brighted and widened until her teeth added their whiteness to her curious charms, and her eyes catching her merriment were like the sky in an April shower. While Meg, earnest, pitiful, was thinking out a way to provide for repentant Calamity, and with slow soft speech was uttering her thoughts, growing more confident, and earnest as she spoke.

"I—I am without friends except my husband, and he in marrying me, cut himself off from his rich connection. If I were single, I would say to you now, come home with me, Jane, God has provided a home for you. But for this, I must ask my husband's consent. He will give it, I know he will, I *hope* he will, when he sees how my heart is in it. He loves me. He will not refuse me."

As DePew, his pride of birth and horror of notoriety came to his wife's thoughts, her lovely color faded, her lips trembled, and her eyes, raised for the

first time to Calamity's, entreated of her, as only such eyes can entreat, that she would believe what Meg only dared hope.

"Oh! you are delicious!" Calamity's laugh rang out more merrily than before. "You are simply delicious! In your sweet purity ready to believe in a reprobates conversion, and that a proud man of the world would take into his house the cast-away of society? Meg DePew !Meg DePew, was there ever a woman like you? Sweetest creature, I would give ten years of my life just to kiss you."

"You may kiss me, now," said Meg, still quivering with her pity for this sister woman.

"Kiss you!" Calamity's laugh had now a sob in it, "with those women looking on, sweet soul, my kiss would blast you more than the lightning; why my hands are burning to touch yours, yet I would not, not to save me from death, unless by some merciful accident these twenty pairs of eyes were for an instant rendered sightless. No, I have lived a life of danger, a lawless life, I have seen the good and evil, mostly evil," with a shrug, and a toss of her head, "but never have found so sweet a creature as you, Meg DePew. You can't remember me? Yet not a word or gesture of yours can I ever forget. Even the baby you held became dear to me. I left for your sake, a present for it at Rapid City. I would give you something, I would have something of yours. Take this, it is honestly mine. I found it in the sand as I walked up to this picnic, just to see you. Drop something for me on the earth, I will pick it up and rush away, lest, if I stood longer looking into your sweet soul, through those clear eyes, I do something that may injure you. Quick!"

She spoke in low whisper, her blue eyes growing black as her pupils dilated, and her mouth trembling with agitation as she held out to Meg a tiny nugget of gold.

"Take it; you do not doubt my word?" she asked,

while Meg with hand in pocket, was thinking what she could give to this strange woman, who, whatever she might be called, she could not believe was evil. The only articles Meg had about her that could be given, were her wedding ring and a relic of the mother who died at her birth. Both were dear to her, but the ring she could not part from, so upon the ground she dropped the prayer-beads she had carried all her life, and taking the nugget said:

"I do not doubt you, Jane," feeling as one in a dream, for Calamity Jane and the young road agent were mingled and mixed together.

"Farewell, Meg DePew, when I am dying I will claim the kiss you offered me to-day."

With a bow Calamity unobserved caught the prayer beads from the ground, and like a wild deer, bounding down the mountain, was soon out of sight.

Still with the feeling as if she were dreaming, Meg walked slowly toward the group of ladies surrounding the one who, having given Meg her invitation, felt that responsibility rested on her.

"It is very strange! What can Calamity Jane have to say to Mrs. DePew?"

"I wonder if Mrs. DePew is quite—quite the person for us to know."

"Dear me, I wish I could hear what this creature is saying to her," were some of the comments of the lookers-on, while Calamity talked to Meg.

The feeling of the ladies was controlled and modified, however, when Calamity bounding away and Meg turning back to join them, her hostess said:

"Mrs. DePew is young and ignorant of the ways of society. Of course she is the sort of person to know, or *I* would not have invited her. As for what *that* creature may be saying, I have not the slightest curiosity, and, ladies, if you will be goverened by me, you will not mention this incident in Deadwood. Well, my dear, have you had a pleasant conversation?" she asked patronizingly, as Meg approached.

"What was it she gave you?" being asked at the same time by one of the other ladies, Meg held out the nugget.

"Pshaw! Was that all? While she was giving, she might have given something worth the keeping! That don't even buy you a pound of candy," was the unanimous verdict of the ladies, whose jealousy of Meg abating, as they found out of her how little value was Calamity Jane's present, they took out of their pockets their bottles of gold-dust and small nuggets which in the scarcity of coin, and plenty of gold, was the current money of Deadwood.

"See! It takes this much for a pound of French candy," pouring some into their hands to show Meg the amount. "Ah, well," she said, "I don't need candy, but I'll keep my nugget in memory of to-day."

Whereupon, in recovered spirits, indeed somewhat gayer from the effects of their excitement, the party descended the hills, and returning to Deadwood by another gulch, came upon a forlorn-looking cabin, at whose door a woman sat, nursing a baby.

"Does she look like a belle or a beauty?" whispered Meg's companion.

"Poor, tired creature; she looks too ill for either," responded Meg, who had bowed as they passed the cabin.

"Yet," said her informant, "that woman, within one week, had three hundred offers of marriage."

"Is it possible!" Meg exclaimed, aghast at such a terrible situation; and then flushing scarlet as all the ladies laughed, and she felt she had been made the dupe of her credulity.

"It is a fact," asserted the leader of Deadwood's fashionable world. "Circumstances sometimes do more than either beauty or agreeability. For that very unattractive creature happened to be the first woman who arrived in Deadwood! What an excitement she created! No gold mine ever awakened a

like feeling. The run on white shirts was so great that within *four hours* there was not one left in town. And the poor fellows who were delayed at their mines were forced to be content with paper collars when the stage drove up with its precious load! Out skipped the woman, amid a deep but feeling silence. So full of feeling was that silence, that in less than a week every single man in town—and there were three hundred—laid himself and—his claim, at her feet. Unfortunate creature! She chose the poorest! So there she sits nursing a baby and cooking her dinner, when she might have been worth her thousands."

"Perhaps she loved the one she chose." Meg's timid suggestion awakened such mirth among the ladies, that the "woman's picnic" returned to Deadwood in a burst of laughter, while on the streets, drawn up as if in dress parade, were the wild looking, but most respectful men.

CHAPTER VIII.

"CALAMITY JANE."

MEG found her husband waiting at their door for her, where, it being the first on the road leading to Main Street, the ladies left her, at her tiny house.

"I'm glad you're safe home, and vexed that I consented to your going," said DePew, biting his mustache.

"I am glad, too, since I am with you."

Meg's soft reply did not entirely turn her husband's wrath, but it concentrated his vexation on himself.

"To be sure, love," he said, as he pulled less fiercely at his mustache, "I don't blame you, who are too innocent to know that the whole town is talking of this 'woman's picnic.' Why, I'm told they paraded themselves right down Main Street, just as strong-minded women might do. I have been fairly raging at myself all day, and this afternoon I learned that that notorious character, Calamity Jane, had arrived last night, from nobody knows where, and had declared in the saloon of Madame Mustache, the faro dealer, opposite the hotel, that she would be of the party. I am told that bets were taken by all the gamblers present, and that that woman took a large wager, that she would obtain and exhibit a present of a lock of hair from each lady's head. I don't know how the other men may take it, but if my wife's hair were in possession of such a creature I should feel like killing every man that looked at it."

DePew waited for a few moments, and then, as Meg did not speak, he put his arm about her. He believed she was offended with him, and while the few months of their married life had been to him anxious months; while he who had never counted money, was now first finding himself in hard straits; yet he had not once felt less than happy that *Meg* was his wife.

Impulsive, high-tempered, he had never spoken to her except in tenderest tones; had found her so lovely and lovable that his own impatience had greatly moderated; and now that, in some measure, this impatience had been manifested toward her, he feared he had hurt her, whom he cherished.

"Forgive me, love!" he said.

His answer was a kiss.

"I am not offended," she replied, "I was trying to say something that would make you think better of Calamity Jane!"

Meg's kiss had exorcised the evil spirit from DePew's heart.

"Calamity Jane!" he laughed. "Pah, I'm inclined to believe the whole thing is a myth. It was told me by a not too reputable fellow, who came very near being knocked down for saying that Calamity's scalp locks might all be passed off but yours; for your hair, being of a wonderful gold, would at once be known as the hair of Lawyer DePew's wife. I declare, Meg, I am both stupid and ill-natured, for I not only believed him, but had it not been for the knowledge that harm to me would have hurt you, I would have kicked the fellow into the streets, and have had a first-class row on my hands. Instead of which I came home—a most cheerless place in your absence, love—and fumed and fretted, until when you did appear I was growling like a bear."

He could laugh over it now, with her arms about his neck and her soft cheek pressed to his; laugh,

too, that Meg should want him to think better of Calamity Jane. But it was like Meg.

"Why, my girl!" he laughed, "I'm afraid you will make a bad Christian. I believe if any one spoke ill of the devil, you would try to urge something in his favor. Yet you never could know any thing of any devil."

DePew looked very handsome, as his eyes shone with a happy light. He looked handsome, too, when they flashed and a frown came to his dark face, when Meg said:

"But, love, I do know Calamity Jane, and I can not believe ill of her."

"Know Calamity Jane! Where in the—" he checked himself. And then stiffly, but more quietly, "I would like to hear what my wife knows of such a person."

It was Meg's turn to laugh. But it was not a merry, happy laugh. She thought of the woman, as, shaken with sobs, she had leaned on her rifle. She thought of her offer to open her husband's home to her, and then she looked at the handsome face, with its flashing eyes and heavy frown. These were called up at the bare name of her to whom *she* had offered a home!

"What do you know of that—that notorious woman?" asked DePew, not inclined to join in Meg's weak and unmirthful laughter, as she said:

"I know that she came to the picnic to-day."

"She did!" was DePew's amazed explanation.

"That she had each of the twenty ladies give her a lock of their hair," continued Meg.

"What!" DePew's face burned with rage. He grasped his hat and started for the door, filled only a man can imagine with what wild plans. But Meg stood before him. She was trembling with nervousness, but she controlled it, saying demurely:

"She has no hair of mine. I was the twenty-first." And then, while DePew hesitated between amuse-

ment, relief and, man that he was, curiosity; Meg went on, "No, she did not ask for a lock of my hair, but she walked with me a few steps off—in sight of all of them," she quickly interposed, when DePew's eyes darkened. "And then, O darling, I wish I could tell you what she said and how she said it. I wish I could show you her eyes filled with tears, and her body shaking with sobs, as there, alone with me, she cried out that for such as she, the world had no pity, no shelter."

Meg's own lovely eyes and tender mouth, Meg's clasped hands upraised, touched her husband more than Calamity's would have done. Yet, generous, noble-hearted fellow as he was, such a possibility as shaming the cruel world, and taking into his home, placing with his wife, a notorious woman, never entered his mind.

"Well, Meg, I am sorry for all women who go astray. The world is harder on them than on men. But this one, this Calamity Jane, is perfectly lawless. Who could offer her a home? Who would dare take her in?"

"I would," said Meg, solemnly.

"You! Meg, you are mad. Why, the creature would rob you before twenty-four hours had passed, and murder you too. Ah, my dear girl, I am thankful your husband is more worldly-wise. If I were convinced that any woman, however fallen, wished to reform, I would help her in every possible way. But to take her to my house, to bring her in contact with my wife—that is something no living man dare do."

"Then how would you help her? With money? That would not raise her out of the depths. Repentance can not always be in extremes! A fallen woman has a heart, a necessity for companions who will elevate. She needs relief from too painful memory. She must be made to feel that her sins have not cast her out from the world, where she desires

to return. Ah! husband! darling! could not such a woman find a home with us? If not, it is as Jane said, there is no place for the repentant. For repenting, her companions in sin cast her off, and then, no one of the other, the unsoiled, *untempted* class will receive her." Meg's voice trembled.

"Meg! Wife!" DePew took her in his arms. "Beloved, there is nothing you could ask that I would refuse, except to injure you. This foolish whim of your too tender heart, would be to *you* the most fatal injury. I would be a most unworthy husband, if I permitted that, or any notorious woman, to enter my house. If Calamity Jane, who, as far as I can learn, enjoys her wild life, really desires to repent and reform, I will do for her what I would not do to save my own life: I will write back to New York, and interest in her some wealthy people. They could help her far more than I could. They would rather enjoy the prominence they would obtain by having as a *protége* a wild Western character. Where is this wonderful Jane, that from all reports is as much of a man as she is a woman?"

"She has gone," said Meg.

"Ah, my sweet girl!" DePew was laughing again. "She was only playing upon you. She did not wish to reform."

And though his wife told him all that passed between her and the vagabond, though she repeated with touching pathos the woman's outburst against the possibility of repentance; she never moved him from this opinion.

In the evening he came home triumphant; for on a pole in Main Street, under a lantern, was pasted a paper with twenty locks of hair upon it. Opposite each lock was the name of the donor, and underneath, in round, clear characters, much like the writing of a school-boy, was:

"If any one wants revenge, let him meet me five miles out from Rapid City. CALAMITY JANE."

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE "BULLFINCH."

UP at his mine Oliver worked day and night. He was driving the tunnel, which had about reached the ground that by surface measurement was included in his claim, but upon which he had every but ocular proof, that the "Stillwater Company" was working. There was no longer any doubt, for on the other side of the thin partition of rock, the old man raged, as with ghostly sound the voices and laughter of the miners came to him. "Devils! They're larfin' ter think they are takin' out my rock, usin' my gold! Lord! An' ter hear that purty wife o' Charley's talk o' souls! Ken a man hev a soul an' jest for wages, rob o' his own another workin' man? Souls! I'll send some o' em, whar it'll be a heap warmer than that tunnel." Old Oliver was alone in his cabin, cleaning his rifle and filling the cartridge belt, making ready to combat for his rights. "Ter night, I calkurlates ter cut through an' meet 'em face ter face. Thar's the warnin'! Ef they don't listen ter that argyment p'r'aps they'll listen to this."

He tapped his rifle, loading it, and then picking up a huge piece of brown wrapping paper, read over with great relish the words to which he had devoted much time and considerable labor.

"To all who it consarns—

"Ebenzar Oliver havin diskivered an located this here Bullfinch, an knowin that it is being wurked does warn off o his groun, any sech, as dar wurk on it, under penalty o deth. EBEN OLIVER."

He looked at the words, chuckling to himself: "I calculate that'll fix 'em! Thieves! An' they can't say as how I killed 'em without a warnin'. No! Soul or no soul. Oliver ain't the boy as 'll shoot the unsuspectin'."

He posted the notice just at the opening of the tunnel that on the surface was on the "Stillwater" grounds, but which, leaving the daylight, sought in the darkness the richer quartz of the neighboring "Bullfinch," and then giving a glance up to the sky, said with his low chuckle:

"They'll soon be out for their dinners! P'r'aps they'll find a sauce most as appetizin' as Mexican peppers!"

Going to the cabin he put the belt around his body, took the rifle in one hand, and his dinner bucket in the other, and leaving them just inside the tunnel, where he was working, stood at its mouth waiting for the miners to come out for their mid-day meal. He counted them as they emerged into the daylight. "Five! An' six on night shift! Wal, I guess I'll be ekal ter—— Dern 'em!"

For gathered around the notice he had written one was reading it aloud, while the others laughed in derision. The reader shouting out on seeing Oliver:

"So yer on the fight, are yer! Yer can't let yer ole bones rest! Hev ter try ter put 'em in a bloody grave! Yer'd best go ter the wukhouse. Thar is a home pervided for ole fools!"

The old man ground his teeth with rage, swearing every oath he had ever learned. Yet while he raged and cursed, his heart was kind. And in this kind heart he regretted the fighting, perhaps the killing, that must come if he would protect his property.

"It's no use, Charley," he had said, as delay followed delay, and the court's officer did not examine the workings of the "Stillwater" mine. "The law be derned. I hes ter fight 'em off, or they'll rob me

of most of it, afore we ken git that derned thief ter measure off their ground. Once my tunnel's through, he'll hev ter come, or hang me ef I don't kill him too, now I'm in the bizness."

Whereat DePew, whose young blood was considerably excited, rejoined: "I agree with you, Oliver. A mining camp is a bad place to trust to the slow decisions and tardy protection of law. It is all very well when the client only represents a fee, but when he is a good old fellow like you, whom I hold as a friend, I grow impatient! I'll come up and help you!"

But to this Oliver would not consent.

"No," he shook his head. "No, I'll fight this out alone. Ef yer gits in, it will damage the case in the courts. Further, it might be suspected as it war not fer principle but fer property Lawyer DePew was a fightin'!" This argument had prevailed with DePew, but it was not Oliver's first thought. That he spoke to himself while he watched DePew riding homeward, down the gulch.

"No! No!" said the old man. "Ef I gits killed, who'll keer? None p'r'aps but that young feller. But ef he war ter be shot down, whar's the mine as 'ud comfort that nice little gal what b'lieves in a soul! Lord! Lord! A soul! The only ones I'm convinced of are these yer! An' I'm derned ef they ain't half paper."

He looked at his boots muddied over with the red clay of his claim, chuckling to himself as he thought of Meg's discourse on immortal souls. And then he had gone to his work, which, being a sharp Yankee, he had managed so skillfully that while he knew perfectly well that other picks were being struck into the rock, his had not been heard. He had kept his blows in time with the others, striking only when theirs had been struck, and being alone, continually on the alert, had advanced his work without being suspected.

Thus his notice was looked upon as an idle threat by the strong young fellows who jeered at him, while he stood swearing out his rage.

"Old! Work-house, is it? Oh! Dern yer! Old as I be, I ken wake yer all up. Yer has yer warnin'; if yer don't take it, it ain't no fault o' mine."

He went into his tunnel, where, sitting on a stone, he drank his coffee and tried to eat. But he had no appetite. Filled with an excitement he could not control, he paced up and down, until, hearing the men re-enter into the "Stillwater" tunnel, he walked noiselessly along to the thin partition of rock that yet divided them.

It was but a shell of quartz that concealed the old man from those that, under his breath, he called, "Them derned thieves!"

So thin a shell that he had pierced it in several places, and through the apertures, too small for them to perceive, there came to him, standing in the darkness, the glimmer of their candles.

He put his eyes to one of the little holes, hardly able to control himself as he saw the shift of men, only a few feet away, picking down the rock of whose richness he could judge by the fact that instead of rolling it out in cars, they were busily sacking it.

Suddenly Oliver's rage changed to amusement; the long wrinkles came into his cheek, and leaning against the rock he shook with suppressed laughter.

"They is sackin' it fer me. Derned perlite o' them; fer sure as I war born o' honest parients, not a pound o' that rock 'll they ever kerry out o' that."

His laughter over, he counted the kegs of powder that he had piled around, examined his fuse, walking with noiseless steps out "fer a breath o' fresh air an' a look at the purty sky," and then back again at his post of observation, listened and waited.

"Lord! how tedious this is," he whispered to himself, as, sitting on a powder-keg, he tried to find

consolation in tobacco. But in these moments of suspense even tobacco was powerless.

Hours passed, the most trying of old Oliver's trying life. Finally, hearing the foreman call "Time!" he sprang to his feet, and with a blow of his pick, making a great hole in the rock that divided him from "them thieves," through the opening thrust his body, with rifle ready.

"Go! yer derned thieves!" he shouted. "Go! Yer has worked yer last on Oliver's ledge!"

His sudden apparition had something in it supernatural to the miners, who believed him divided from them by a good many feet of solid rock. Recovering somewhat at the sound of his voice, they made a stand, determining to resist, until the click of Oliver's rifle, and his determined, "Go! or I'll fire!" made them see the charms of discretion.

They took to their heels, pursued to the very tunnel's mouth by the old man.

"To the work-house, is it?" he shouted. "No, yer thieves! Old or young, no work-house for Oliver. He can pertect his own."

For a second he stood enjoying his triumph. It was a second that repaid him for many hours of pain, as, chuckling with delight, he exclaimed:

"Beat! the lot on 'em! and not a shot fired. Ter the work-house, ha! ha!"

Then, hastily piling stones at the mouth of the tunnel, he hurried back, stepping off the "Bullfinch" ground, which, with muttered imprecations, he found reached the first turn in "Stillwater" workings.

"I'll fix 'em," he said. Picking away vigorously in the soft rock he soon had quite a pile of it, behind which he rolled kegs of powder. Attaching a fuse to this, he stood at his own tunnel with the other end in his hand, as the day-shift of the "Stillwater" company, re-enforced by the night-shift, marched up in order of attack.

Unseen by them, Oliver watched their movements,

as, on finding themselves barricaded out, they gathered in a knot of consultation.

Apparently concluding the old man was playing a game of bluff, the party walked up to the tunnel with the determination of forcing an entrance.

"Keerful!" called the old man, "the powder's placed, the fuse is ready; tech a rock an' you'll be blowed ter—ter hell!" At this last word he chuckled, "Hell! That's what the little gal b'lieves in who goes her pile on souls."

With all his chuckling and good-humor, his eyes were on the lookout for his enemies. As two of the party came toward his tunnel, he hid behind some rocks, holding in full view the barrel of his rifle, muttering:

"I means murder, an' wants 'em ter know it. Oliver don't kill no onsuspectin' man."

The rifle possessed a powerful argument, its silent protest being sufficient to make the foremost of these envoys withdraw rather hastily.

"Oliver," he said, "we don't want no foolin'. The mine's nuthin' ter us. Yer has gone ter law. Fight it out with the company, but don't be so tarnal mean as ter keep a lot o' honest fellers from earnin' wages."

To this no answer being returned, the man again came to the mouth of the tunnel, when "click!" he heard the trigger raised, and backed once more into the open air.

"Look yer"—he dropped his former conciliatory tone—"look yer, Oliver, don't be a derned fool. Yer can't stop the Stillwater Company a wukkin' it's own mine. They'll bring the law upon yer, an' hev yer whisked off ter jail. Come out, I say, an' don't be a-hidin'."

Still no answer. Whereat the man, pulling at his revolver, walked to the tunnel, when the muzzle of the rifle advanced and Oliver's shout, "Keerful!" made him again retreat. After a few whispered

words the two men went back to the main body, where a variety of counsels prevailed.

Some were for rushing into Oliver's tunnel, others were for breaking down the barricade placed at the mouth of their own, and others, again, were for standing guard and starving out the old man. There was a half-hour of animated discussion, when the majority, believing that Oliver was singly trying to scare them off, and that the rocks once removed from their tunnel, their way would be clear, the gang of ten men went to work. In a few moments, with jeers and laughter, they had pulled down the barricade and entered their tunnel. There, coming upon another pile of rocks, they had just begun to throw them to one side when, "Keerful, she's fired!" shouted only a few feet from them, made them turn and fly for their lives. They had barely reached the mouth of the tunnel when a terrific explosion was heard, the ground under their feet shaking with the great blast, and the volumes of smoke rolling out of the tunnel fairly blinding them.

There was a moment's shock! They believed Oliver, in warning them, had perished in the mine. They waited a little for the smoke to clear away, determining they would "do the fair thing by him an' give the derned fool a decent burial." But their kindly feelings were put to flight by the appearance of Oliver himself. At the opening of the "Bullfinch," not one hundred feet away, he stood shaking his rifle, his face black with smoke, smoke, too, on his gray hair, grimed in with blood, but with life and fire enough left for any desperate deed, as he yelled:

"Thar! Go, will yer? Yer steals no more! Oliver holds this fort!"

CHAPTER X.

A TREACHEROUS ENEMY.

HIS voice echoed and re-echoed through the gulch, whose windings in and out made it possible for the workers at their different claims to see each other's dumps, just by climbing the rocks that overhanging the gulches had in consequence been named "Points Lookout."

They were now crowding upon these observatories, for even in that place of blasts and explosions the thunders of old Oliver's war cannons had announced some extra ceremonial.

"Ef the ole cuss ain't fired out the hull gang!" laughed one, hurrying down to Deadwood with the news.

The town was agog with amazement and full of ridicule for the Stillwater miners, who were overpowered by one man, "an' he past sixty."

On the arrival of the foreman of the mine he was so much joked at and made fun of that he swore he would "oust Oliver out of his position," if it took him his year's wages, and his life to boot, offering to the gang of men, in the name of their employers, five thousand dollars, if "they'd get even." Upon this offer followed a secret conference of the miners, after which, on being requested to know what the owners of the mine desired, the foreman shrugged his shoulders, giving to his men this valuable information:

"Boys, the owners o' the Stillwater don't want ter know nuthin'. But"—adding with determina-

tion—"yer ken be assured any man as gits in a tight place for our company'll be pertected."

Thus the battle against old Oliver was virtually transferred from the mine owners to the mine workers, the wealthy company, in Pilate fashion, washing its hands of any crime that might be committed by a reckless set of men, whose anger and pride aroused, were banded against him who, alone and unaided, had virtually conquered them.

What was a life more or less to these? Deaths resulting from a battle over a claim were of such common occurrence that to those who had grown up among such scenes, it seemed the natural solution of difficulties. As long as the ground was unmeasured the right was on their side as much as on Oliver's, and to keep that ground uncertain, meant the extra pay each man received for regular work.

This had been a private understanding between the men and their foreman, for in this, as in the present plan against Oliver, the Stillwater Company appeared only by proxy. Prominent men, men of wealth, they could not risk their reputation in such a quarrel; but that they would protect all in their service, and that other mining camps could always be reached by miners who felt the Black Hills did not agree with them, were facts perfectly clear to, and thoroughly understood by, the men working for this company.

When the miners learned that they could win the five thousand "an' get even," in their own fashion, they called another meeting, where they drank plentifully of liquor furnished by their obliging foreman, and cast lots; the two men upon whom the lot had fallen going to their foreman, awaiting in another room the result of this conference, simply stated that they had concluded to stop "up ter mine."

What else they had concluded, was not asked. But money in abundance for all needs was furnished, the

reward after they "war through," again promised, and visits arranged by their fellow-laborers, so they "wouldn't grow lonesome." They started at once for their post, leaving the rest of the "Stillwater" gang the jest and ridicule of Deadwood.

They laughed off the jeers and taunts of the camp; going occasionally to see the two miners who "was just a watchin' fer our side," in the temporary cabin they hastily erected, near the mouth of their tunnel.

Old Oliver was still "holding the fort." It was held pretty thoroughly, fresh barricades being placed at the opening of "Stillwater" tunnel, and to his notice being attached:

"Keerful! It's packed with Giant this time. Deth ter him who dares enter till the groun is mesured, and rong rited. "OLIVER."

He kept inside his tunnel, which was also barricaded, coming occasionally to look at, and laugh with the men whose cabin was so situated that they were *vis-a-vis* to him.

This self-imposed captivity, this idle watching, was very irksome to the old fellow, to whom hard work and sunshine were necessities. But he had not been without a friendly visit, for DePew, hearing the news of Oliver's battle, had ridden out at once to the scene of action.

He had come upon Oliver as, chewing away at his tobacco, he was busily building fresh barricades, clapping him on the shoulder in congratulation.

"Hurrah, old hero!" DePew had exclaimed, and then had laughed as Oliver turned to him, his face all blackened by powder, out of which the sharp, gray eyes twinkled with fun.

"Hero be I? Wal, Charley, here's my hand. Give it a good shake. Fer I come a nigh ter shakin' wi' a rock, I war so darned pleased wi' myself. Eleven on one, counting the foreman. All beat, drove

out by a old feller as they was a-talkin' o' sendin' ter the work-house! Ha, ha! I jest yelled fer joy, when I seen them heels a-flyin' afore me an' my gun! Me alone, jest me!"

The long wrinkles covered his face, as his mouth widened with laughter. Then poking DePew in the ribs: "I say, Charley, yer ken tell that purty wife o' yourn that I jest begins ter b'lieve in souls, an' a hereafter, jest now, sence for onc't I war helped."

When his laugh was over DePew assisted him to build the double barricade, stepping off, first, the claim on the surface, laying down the compass, which is the miner's necessity, taking the points, and then repeating the same measures in the tunnel, to be assured that when the case did come on they had the law with them.

"It's Giant this time, Charley. No more darned foolishness. Ef they tries ter get in, that'll pile up rock as'll pervent work."

The "Stillwater Company" had excavated a large chamber of rock, which, if that sacked and that still left were fair samples, was exceedingly rich.

"Ef I were a guessing I should say two hundred thousand wouldn't kiver it," said Oliver, meditatively. Then frowning as he stamped his foot, "But I'll not think o' it, for it's already nigh drove out the b'lief in souls I was a-tryin' ter hev jest ter please that little gal o' yourn."

Out of the tunnel under the quiet stars that looked most beautiful seen through the pines which in this gulch grew thick and high, DePew and Oliver decided that the best thing to be done was, for Oliver to "hold the fort," as he called it, and for DePew to start at once for the officer appointed by the court to inspect and measure the litigated ground.

As going for this officer would probably take several days, since it was impossible to tell his exact

whereabouts, and the camps were at distances from each other, DePew helped Oliver remove his provisions into his tunnel, when, filling the barrel with water, the old man was prepared to resist a long siege.

The first day of absolute loneliness had been intolerable to Oliver. He actually welcomed the coming of the two "Stillwater" miners, watching the building of their cabin with interest. Occasionally even shouting a word of direction as, less experienced, they made errors that would have rendered their not too comfortable abode uninhabitable in case of a storm. Thus a sort of good feeling grew up between the old fellow guarding his rights, and the young fellows determined to rob them away from him.

"I suppose yer is come ter see I don't take any o' my own rock?" called Oliver, chewing and laughing, as the others nodded "yes."

"Well, yer needn't fret, I ain't agoin' ter stick a pick inter it. It'll keep, can't spile, and can't eat nothin', and purty soon I'll have the legal as well as the moral right ter take my own. Yer seems right clever boys! P'r'aps I'll give yer a job!" said the old feller chuckling over his words.

"When ye's ready to give, we's ready ter take," answered the others, laughing at Oliver's joke.

The two had quite a pleasant time of it, playing cards, throwing dice, settling their wages, losing, winning, drinking whisky, talking to their visitors; in fact doing all that is supposed to make up a miner's enjoyment.

But to Oliver, penned up in the tunnel, the hours grew almost insupportable. He became so nervous and restless from inaction, that he lost his appetite, tobacco sickened him and a slow fever set in.

Yet he never wavered in his determination "to hold the fort." "I hes promised Charley, an' I likes thet lad. As for the derned gold, I don't kear so much for it. Seems somehow as thet there precious

metal I've been a-sarchin' fer fer fifty years ain't half so precious as a good tin cup o' col' water. My! but this yer baril's got a orful taste."

He spat out the mouthful of water he had just taken, sitting down on a keg and looking over his barricade at the two miners in their cabin door, who talked and laughed together.

"Two clever young fellers! I wonder why they tuk the fancy o' helpin' rich men ter steal from me! God knows I wouldn't injure them, nor no man, livin' nor dead! But I s'pose they is young an' foolish, an' ain't got nobody to talk to them o' their souls. Ha! ha! nice little gal. Purty as a picter! It's quar all thet she said o' souls!"

Then leaning his head against the rock he fell into a feverish sleep, wherein dreaming that the Stillwater workmen, re-enforced by the whole of Deadwood, were coming to drive him from his claim, he sprang to his feet, grasping his rifle and shouting, "Yer can't take it till yer takes my life," wakened himself, to find that the two young fellows opposite had ceased laughing at each other to laugh at him.

"What's up, ole man? Has yer got 'em agin? Snakes this time, or tigers?" called one.

"Yer ken laugh," said Oliver in a low, husky voice. "Yer ken laugh. 'Tain't no law agin it. But I'm derned if yer gits my claim. Though what I wants a claim fer God knows. I ain't got no use fer money. Leastwise not much, an' thar's no one on top o' the groun' as keers fer old Oliver."

Resting his aching head on his hard hands, two tears trickled down his cheeks, running in the furrows the long wrinkles had made.

"Tears! Wal, I jest b'lieves I has the jimjams, o' suthin' else! I ain't cried sence I'se growed old! 'Sides I lie! Fer I b'lieve Charley likes me. I b'lieve he jest goes a pile on me, an' I'm derned ef I don't make him my heir. P'r'aps"—he chuckled as he hunted in his pockets for a piece of paper,

"P'raps they'll name their fust child fer me! Ebenezer Oliver DePew. That's better'n havin' a young 'un fer myself."

Stirred into something like animation, he carefully opened an old envelope that was fragrant with tobacco and wrote on his knee:

"I, Ebenezer Oliver, gives and bequeethes all I has ter Charles DePew and his children forever. ☞ The copy of original locashun is hid atween my bed-slats. EBENEZER OLIVER."

"That'll fix 'em. Fer even ef the record's burned the copy'll be safe," he said, and read over what he had written.

Then carefully placing the envelope between two larger pieces of hard tobacco, he tied them together with a bit of twine and began preparations for supper. But he could not eat. His mouth and throat were parched with thirst. Again he tried a cup of water from the barrel, and again spat it out. Even the tea tasted "o' thet tarnel bar'l."

"Now, ef I could jest git my mouth down ter that crack, wouldn't I draw in a keg full," he said, craning out his neck until he could almost see where, a tiny thread of brightness, the little stream ran down the mountain side into the gulch.

"What's the ole varmint up to?" asked one of his watchers. "I'm gettin' orful tired o' sittin' yer like a cat afore a rat-hole." To which the other replied, "Wal, ef yer so tired, why don't yer walk up thar and kill him? Yer hes swored ter do it."

"Yes; but ef I does thet, he may git the drop on me!" said the first speaker, who was the younger of the two. "Wal, yer jest wait! Take a hand with me. He won last time, an' I wants ter git back the money. Hurry, lad, fer I sees signs o' the ole man weakenin', an' we ain't got too much time ter play afore we skips the camp with our jackets full o' chink. It is a good thing to hev rich pards. There

they is jest carryin' off the officers from camp to camp, while the lawyer chap's a-chasin' arter, an' we sits here a-watchin' that ole fool."

"Ef he'd not been the wust o' fools he'd just compromised this business, an' insted o' fightin' fer his rights an' losin' his life, he'd marched out o' camp with a cool fifty thousand. But such as he is, he is! Take a hand, I say, and let me win back my money," said the elder of the two young fellows.

They played on, while Old Oliver at his tunnel's mouth, hot with fever, thirsted for a drink from the creek.

The sun set, the stars came out, and still the old man fought down his burning thirst.

"I darsn't go, though it be only fifteen feet away. I darsn't go! 'Tain't fer the derned gold. No, 'tain't that. Purty little gal who b'lieves in souls. So bright an' clear her eyes looked as she said it. No, 'taint only fer the gold; it's fer my right. Gord! a man's no better'n a dog as wouldn't die fer his rights!"

He raised himself to his full height, staggering as he tried to walk, while his head throbbed and ached until he could hardly see.

"It's all foolishness, this yer dyin' fer a drink o' water. Yet I'm derned ef I wouldn't give every thin' but my rights jest fer the privilege o' puttin' my mouth ter thet creek an' fillin' my ole stomach with cool water." As he spoke he was examining the fuse, seeing that it was properly fixed to fire at a moment's warning. This was his last duty, faithfully performed every night of the six which he had passed in the tunnel. And now the seventh, he did it, just as carefully holding the end of the fuse in his hand, with matches continually at his side as he lay down on his blankets and tried to sleep.

But court it as he might, no sleep would come to him; with aching bones, and splitting head, he moved and turned until sighing:

"I'm derned ef I ken stan' this yer nonsense," he pulled himself up, and still holding the fuse, picked up the matches and walking to the tunnel's mouth, looked at the cabin opposite.

"Jest for company," he said to himself. But the cabin light was out, every thing was still, not a living object in the whole gulch, as far as Oliver's eyes could reach.

"How good the air feels!" He stretched out his head to enjoy it, and as he did so, there came to his ears the faint trickling of the tiny creek as it ran on in its happy way between rocks and mosses.

"Lord! but I'm parchin' with thirst, I wonder ef I ken make it! Jest fifteen feet there and fifteen feet back. Them boys is asleep! 'Sides them is clever boys. They ain't got nuthin' agin' me. Lord, ef their cabin was a-burnin', wouldn't I just skip across thar and help? I calkerlate so."

Again he leaned out, listening to the creek, until between fever and thirst he was nearly mad. But in his madness he did not forget his rights, rolling out the fuse and holding to the matches as he thought, "Ef they starts I'll fire it, though Gord knows I'd hate to hurt 'em. Them's jest two clever lads."

Softly he stepped across the barricade, feeling a thrill of delight as he stood erect in the fresh night air. Then noiselessly as an Indian, he walked to the creek, to reach which he had to turn his back upon the cabin, where of the two miners, one was sleeping, the other watching.

"Git up I say! Git up!" whispered the watcher, trying to shake the other out of his heavy doze, "Git up! He's out! Wake, yer derned fool, or I'll throttle you," he spoke in louder tone.

Oliver, reaching the creek, had swallowed a mouthful of the delicious water, when in the stillness the miner's voice reached him. "Git up! Take your gun. Remember, we fires tergither, so we can't tell who did it. Git up, yer fool!"

Perfectly audible now, the words fell on Oliver's ears, penetrated his understanding that, weakened by fever, had regained its clearness in the beautiful clear night.

"So thet's yer game!" he said, running a few paces, until having shortened the fuse, he lit it as bang! bang! went two rifles, and the old man fell.

He lay on his face, blood flowing from a wound over his heart and from another in his leg. The bright moon shining on him with the splendor of day, when the two miners ran across the dividing space and turning him over examined his wounds.

"Done for!" they exclaimed, and then the younger, who had been the sleeper: "Wal, I'm glad he got his drink o' water. It's a satisfaction ter know he had his last wish afore he left the world. D'yer know, Jim, I couldn't hev fired, 'till I seen him git up from the creek?"

"Yer foolish! Fer I sez, ef yer is obligated ter do a thing do it thorough," replied the other, who, satisfied that Oliver was too near dead to be conscious, was very thoroughly examining his pockets.

The old man's faint gasps grew yet fainter, when rising to his feet "Jim," as his confederate called him, said slowly, "There's nuthin' there. No paper, no copy o' the original location. No papers o' any kind. The hull case jest ends in his life, and a good job it war over. But I wish I was sure he had no copy of records."

"What is that yer hed?" asked the other.

"His 'backy!"

"Yer a cool one, Jim! Don't take it. It's unlucky. Lord!" he started back shivering, as Oliver's eyes suddenly opened, and then with a gasp and slight stiffening of the body, closing again, the younger of the two who had sworn to murder, knocked the package of tobacco out of the other's hands. "Lord, Jim, but you're a cool 'un. I'd starve for a chew afore I'd take it off o' him."

"It ain't that," said the other simply. "Yez is the biggest fool I've ever seen. Ain't we swored to search well an' take all we fin's ter the kermittee?"

"But 'backy! What does they want of 'backy? I say give the ole man his 'backy. I tell yer, Jim," in a mysterious whisper, "I hev heard it said that ef yer takes what the dead likes best, they follers yer. Now, I ain't afeared of the livin', but the dead!" The speaker shivered as a light cloud obscuring the moon, a sudden darkness fell upon them, and then when sailing on the brightness shone upon the ghastly face of the man at their feet, grasped his companion's arm.

"Come, Jim, come! It's awful here!"

"Come! Wal yer hez lost yer ead! Ain't we got ter search the cabin. I tell yer in case any heirs does pop up for the ole chap it would be mighty handy to hold the writin' o' original location. The book o' records can be managed."

"Wal! wal! We ken do it to-morrow! in the daylight. I tell you thar's suthin' awful about night time when yer looks on that!"

With a shudder the younger man pointed to the body of old Oliver that stiff and straight lay at their feet, two pools of blood at his side, and his face turned up to the peaceful sky. It was an awful sight in that still and beautiful gulch; awful too, that old and alone he was killed just because he defended his rights.

But "Jim" was more philosophical than his confederate. He did not waste time looking at that awful face, nor the stiff body lying in its blood.

"It's over," he said. "We swore to fire together so we neither o' us need feel the responsibleness. Yer can't say it was me. I can't say it was you. Now we hez suthin' else ter do. We hez that cabin o' his to look over, else we ain't kept our oath. Come, I say." He dragged the other a few steps,

and then when he resisted, said, "Wal, ef yer don't go, the money mightn't be our'n arter all. Yer hev done the wust. 'Twon't pay to lose the chink now." This argument prevailing, they entered the small cabin of one room, where old Oliver had passed so many hours, dreamed so many dreams.

They were but a short time searching, for there was in it only the necessary furniture of a rough pine bedstead, a table, and two sawn tree trunks for chairs; yet in those few moments the lighted fuse had eaten, eaten, until entering Oliver's tunnel, it hastened to deal death and destruction.

Onward it crept, its dull, red eye more potent than a viper's sting, making the curve in the tunnel, passing the excavated chamber, reaching the giant powder, as nearing their own tunnel the two murderers stopped for an instant. An instant fraught with horror and death. For with a shock, a roar, as if the earth were opening, out from the tunnel's mouth great rocks belched forth, knocking them over, rolling them down the gulch, burying them under their crushing weight.

CHAPTER XI.

"MEG."

SEVEN days alone in her tiny house Meg watched, prayed, waited. No one called upon her. For whether Calamity Jane had created jealousy by her attentions to Mrs. DePew, or whether the lack of attention in not obtaining and proclaiming a lock of her golden-red hair, having kept her name out of the written list, had angered her less fortunate friends; was not known to Meg. She did not trouble herself much about the neglect of the ladies, for Meg had not time to waste on imagining causes, having a great cause lying on her heart. It would have been a painful effort to have conversed with those fortunate women, whose difficulties past, had now no worries, save a diamond more or less, or the unfashionable world in which they were thrown. This world was fashionable enough for Meg, if only in it she could have peace.

But with husband away, riding from camp to camp, facing alone the dangers of those plains, that seen through her loving fears, were terrible places; with old Oliver up in the tunnel and two men waiting for a chance to conquer him, and for her to sit at the window watching the busy throngs crowding Main Street, listening to the noises and revelry of the nights, with now and then a pistol shot making her heart stop beating as some possible horror rushed to her mind, how was peace possible?

"Perhaps he will come to-day!" she said each morning, and then as the day passed, her sudden startings of hope as a step neared her door gave

place to sad endurance. A dozen times she was tempted to go up the gulch to the "Bullfinch."

"It would be less lonely there. I would not hear those fearful shots, nor be terrified by the shouts and laughter," she thought, looking wistfully up the gulch from her door-step, and then hastily entering her house, closing the door as some passer-by stared at her sweet face.

"Yes, I would be better off with Mr. Oliver," she said, whispering the words, for small as was the room, alone in it her voice sounded strange and unnatural. She looked around timidly, then tried to laugh at her fears while she thought over the matter and decided that as Mrs. DePew she had better remain just where her husband had left her.

Again and again she went over this point as the days passed and the noisy nights made sleep impossible to the frightened young creature, who in all the trials of her life had never before been in a house alone.

"If I'd only a cat or a dog, or any living thing," she thought. But there was nothing. Nothing but her own fears and dreads to keep her company, while she waited, watched and prayed. One, two, three, four, five, six days had passed. With the seventh her anxiety for DePew grew so great that she determined to go out, to ask some one about the possible places her husband might have to visit to find the officer, this terrible officer.

With trembling fingers she put on her hat, started off, and when a few feet away turned back.

She could not ask any one. Whatever she suffered she must support alone. A single question would betray her husband's business, the secrecy of which was so important that he had gone out from Deadwood on horseback, as if for a short ride.

The seventh day, the seventh dreary day had passed, and Meg at the window or behind the curtain, looked out with anxious eyes, seeking among

those many figures and numerous horsemen for him she loved.

"Suppose he should never come back! Suppose cold and dead he is lying on those terrible plains! Or perhaps wounded he perishes for lack of care!" Her heart gave dull throbs of anguish at these fearful thoughts, as with fervent prayers she besought heaven for her husband.

An hour passed, the night crept on, the moon peeped in her window, and found her still on her knees praying for her beloved.

Quieted by her devotion, feeling a calm steal over her anxious heart, she gazed upon the beautiful night, and the noisy town ablaze with light. How the noise kept on! How regardless were those who lived of those who died! Into the saloons poured the ceaseless throngs, out of which so many they had known were borne dead! Yet they seemed to feel no horror as they entered upon the road that had led to another's misery.

While she stood and moralized a man ran past the window bareheaded. It was not such an unusual thing in Deadwood to see a bareheaded man. For in a town of its perfect license, men could bare their heads, roll off into a drunken sleep, do almost any thing they pleased so they did not make themselves a public nuisance.

Meg had not lived for months in Deadwood without learning this. Yet now the appearance of that bareheaded man had so excited her, that she trembled. She could hardly stand, and her blood sounded in her ears! She watched him until, lost in the crowd, he was no longer visible. Still she watched —watched for him to return, although the hour was past eleven, and Meg, worn out with anxious days and sleepless nights, needed rest. "Not now,"—she said the words as horrible surmises ran through her mind, for somehow she had fancied that as the man ran past her window he had looked at the house. It

might be only fancy. Yet, even had he looked, it had no meaning, for standing at the outskirts of Main Street this was the first habitation that broke the long solitude from the gulch where there were cabins and tents in plenty, so most people did look at it. Meg knew this, yet could not drive away the idea that that man rushing down into the town had something to tell which concerned her.

What can it be? she thought, for her husband had not gone that way. Perhaps something was wrong with Mr. Oliver—but Meg surmised no more, for now a wagon filled with men drove furiously up Main Street, and, as she stood at the open door nerving herself to ask a question, passed too rapidly for her question to be heard. She caught a word or two, for the men spoke in excited voices, shaking their hands, not noticing her as she tried to listen.

"Two shots—killed—both—explosion—ole varmint."

What do they mean? she asked herself, clasping her hands tight together.

Just then an accident favored her. A gust of wind blew off the hat of one of the men. The wagon stopped; some one sprang down to get it, and as the owner turned his face to the moonlight Meg recognized him.

It was the foreman of the Stillwater Company. Her husband had pointed him out to her, saying: "He's the greatest rascal and smartest thief I have ever known. Why, Meg, so uneducated that he can barely write his own name, he manages the whole of this steal from old Oliver."

Meg stood looking after the wagon. There was something wrong with that old man. Her husband's hopes and ambition were bound up in that Bullfinch case. All those men had gone up as witnesses for the other side. There must be a witness for their side. Whom could she ask? What friend had she in town? Those ladies, would their husbands go?

Would one of them ride up with her? No; she could not expect it. They found their lot hard who lived in ease and comfort. Would they, then, late at night, oblige her? Besides, she could not ride. Their funds were down so low that now they could afford only necessities, and but few of them. To hire a carriage for even this short drive of two miles, was not possible. Besides, there came in again the need for secrecy.

"There is so much money and influence against us, Meg, that we must be wary, careful, secret."

How many times had her husband said this to her. Telling her that to win was almost as necessary to him as she was. "You see my future is in it," he had said. Would they ever win now? What was wrong in the gulch? What could she do to help her husband, who, far away, could not help himself.

Go up to the Bullfinch. Be the witness for your husband. Meg trembled as this idea suggested itself. Yet, trembling and timid, she determined to act upon it. Putting on jacket and hat, she took matches in her pocket, and pinning to the inner door a slip of paper with the words, "An accident has happened. I am going up to the Bullfinch to Mr. Oliver," she closed the outer door, and with a prayer for help, started alone on the road up the gulch. Only two miles, she kept saying it to herself, as she toiled upwards, stopping for breath, looking around her in alarm, thinking of all the frightful things that ever happened to women on lonely roads.

Only two miles, but how long they seemed to her, unaccustomed to rough walking. She believed when she reached the cabins and tents she would be less timid, but walking by them she trembled and grew faint.

What could she do if any one spoke to or sprang upon her? For, with a woman, death is not what she most fears.

So Meg, near the tents and cabins, where might

dwell lawless men, walked close to the bushes, hid behind trees, lest seeing a woman alone in that place at that hour they might mistake her, might——"O Lord, preserve me," she prayed.

As she prayed she thought of Jake, the stage driver. His bitter cynicism, his sad disbelief came before her. Was her faith thus to be tested? Would she pray and yet be destroyed? She clasped her hands, looked up to the sky, prayed, trembled, and feared. Yet, through all, kept on walking as quickly as possible, not wavering in her determination to go to the Bullfinch, dare every danger, and serve her husband!

She went steadily onward, following the one road until coming where the gulch narrowed, she found the empty wagon with its team secured to a tree, while before her spread out a number of trails.

Which was the one to take? She must hurry, for there was no time to lose; those men were already ahead of her. She must be there to see, to know, if her testimony were to be of any use to her husband.

Which was the trail to the Bullfinch? She had but once visited the mine, and then with her husband in daylight; it had been the only trail she had noticed, while now, beckoning her onward, these many paths allured, bewildered her.

Again, in her sweet soul, she prayed for guidance, and again Jake's skepticism came back to her, making itself heard above her faith.

"Guide me," she prayed, calling upon heaven, striving to cast out doubt, and then, still uncertain, took the third trail, climbing to the left of the gulch, which she remembered was the side whereon Oliver's tunnel opened.

"The Lord has helped me," cried out Meg's soul joyfully. "He will help me. He will let the right prevail."

Stronger now, invigorated by that divine elixir, faith, she kept climbing along, until leaving the trail,

she made her way among the rocks, for she recognized a land-mark: Oliver's cabin, with the tiny streamlet near it, whose water she had tasted because the old fellow had solemnly assured her: "Thar ain't nothin' like it, atop o' the earth." To her it had seemed much as any other water, but now, as it served to point out Oliver's cabin from the others resembling it, she called the stream "an angel's finger."

Descending as carefully as she could, bruising her feet, and cutting her fingers on the stones, Meg's heart swelled with gratitude. For in her night's exploits she had disproved poor Jake's disbelief. Unworthy as she was, Heaven had blessed her, had —— "Oh!——" Meg groaned in terror and dismay, for as she reached more level ground, and started for the cabin, she was stopped by something more horrible than any thing her imagination had pictured.

The body of poor old Mr. Oliver lying in a pool of blood—dead!

For a moment Meg stood horror-struck. All the world seemed blotted out by that awful figure at her feet. And then her soul, rising above her nervous, trembling body, she kneeled beside the old man, putting her fingers on his wrists, listening at his heart, as she had read was done upon the field of battle, by holy sisters, no stronger, nor older than she.

She turned deathly faint at the smell of the blood, shook like an aspen as she held the hard old wrist, but with the strength of will, the desire to do her duty, fought off her own sickness. And gradually, as she more thoroughly controlled herself, became conscious that something in that wrist she held throbbed every once in awhile, and the heart at which she listened, made slow, dull thuds.

"He is not dead. What shall I do!" she whispered, trying again to call before her the remedies of those white-bonneted sisters, of whom as a child she had loved to read.

"Stop the blood!" She remembered that was what they always tried to do, so the wounded would not bleed to death.

How could she reach the wounds? The heavy canvas pants resisted her soft fingers, and the shirt! She feared to pull at it lest the slightest jar set the blood into a stronger outpour.

Perhaps there was a knife in his pocket. She ran her fingers in and found one sticking in a piece of tobacco, so hard that it required all Meg's strength to pull it out.

When this was accomplished, she cut a slit in the shirt, exposing the wounded side, where a long, gaping wound looked terrible to her. At the end of this wound was a lump right under the skin, which moved as she touched it.

"The bullet! I must get it out! Oh, must I cut him!" she whispered. Then setting her teeth, gave a little cut to the skin, and out into her hand rolled the bullet.

Hardly knowing what she did she dropped it in her pocket, and then pressing the edges of the wound together held her handkerchief against it. She stopped for a moment thinking how she should manage a bandage. Then pulling off her jacket, to roll as a brace against her handkerchief, took her skirt, which, torn into wide strips, she pressed under his body and pinned together.

The wounded leg was bleeding more freely, but after a little she managed that too, then ran to the creek, and bringing water in an old tin can she found there she bathed his head, and wetted his lips. Still he did not move! Did not even moan! Would he die? Poor old man! How hard it seemed! What else could she do? If only she had a little brandy, that might revive him.

As Meg turned around something dark lay beside her. And she saw it was two huge pieces of tobacco tied together by a piece of twine. "His one com-

fort," she said, sobs coming from her lips and tears from her eyes, for such a barren, lonely life as this poor old man's had been. She cried so bitterly, covering her face with her hands, that she did not hear voices and steps behind her.

"Thar's the old varmint! I seen he was dead afore I run down. What! A woman! Wal——" The three men stepped back, silent with amazement. Until presently, in a whisper, one said: "Wal! Here is a go! Old, ugly, an' pore. I wonder which o' the gals he managed ter git. Come, let's see which o' the beauties hed sech taste." Laughing under their breath they came near to Meg, one of them putting his hand on her shoulder with, "Let's see yer face, gal," and starting when Meg turned her tearful, frightened eyes upon him. Her first terror was lost in the thought, "Perhaps they have brandy. Perhaps that might save him."

"Oh, sir!" she said, springing to her feet, "perhaps you have a little brandy! I am afraid he is dying. Poor old man, shot twice! And with no one here to defend him! He is my husband's friend," she added with a sob, and fresh tears running down her face, that, pure as an angel's, and heavenly in its pity, touched these rough men as no sermon could have done.

"Lawyer DePew's wife. I could ha' swore I seen her at her windy when I ran down to tell yer fellers," the one had whispered who had led the other to look at the "old varmint who was tryin' ter blow up the camp."

The wounded man did not seem now such a varmint when a lady knelt beside him, or stood with clasped hands and tears running down her face, just "for an ole stick like Oliver." Somehow Meg's pity for this miner seemed a personal compliment. He's one of us, they thought. Yes, he was one of them, of all the very poorest, and oldest one in camp. Coming to revile him, they were now "ready 'ter do

any thin' as the lady wants," they informed her, while one pulled out his flask, telling her "ter jest keep it."

They waited while she moistened Oliver's lips and forced a drop or so down his mouth.

They waited while she listened, hoping to hear a moan or see some sign of returning animation, and then, when with trembling voice she said:

"I think he is nearly gone. But will you kindly take him to his cabin, he may die easier on his bed."

They lifted him gently, carrying him to the cabin while Meg followed, holding in her hand "Poor Mr. Oliver's tobacco."

CHAPTER XII.

"DEADWOOD IS DIVIDED."

PLACING him on his bed, one ran for his blankets, "He was campin' in the tunnel," he said; another made a fire in the stove, and another brougnt a bucket of fresh water and piled some wood "handy-like."

They laughed when Meg looked for a pillow.

"Pillar!" they said in derision. "Miners don't hev no sech nonsense, jest a roll o' blankets for our heads, that's our pillars." But when she said she wished he had one they amended their opinion, promising to bring up hers in the morning, and then after offering "ter sit up ef she war afeard," and the offer being thankfully received, and gently declined, they left her alone with the moonlight, with that barely breathing figure on the bed.

They had been so kind and helpful, so gentle in spite of their rough speech, that Meg had not been afraid of them; had found such comfort in their presence, that when they left her, she ran to the door feeling that she could not stay alone with death, that she must call them back.

But she did not, saying only to the one who stepped toward her to ask "Ef the missus wanted any thin'," "You will surely bring the pillows. For should he linger, he will need whatever comforts we can give him, and—and a doctor! You will ask one to come as soon as possible, won't you?"

"Sartain, ma'am, sartain. Thank you," the man replied to Meg's soft "Good-night."

She waited at the door until he had joined the

others who were walking toward the place where the loose rocks lay, that she had noticed as she had climbed the mountain.

The men were hurriedly rolling them off. They seemed to be looking for something, but Meg could not wait to see, for a faint moan summoned her to the bed.

Almost entirely without experience in sickness of any kind she had only a tender nature and true soul for helps. But these are wonderful helps. The greatest sufferer need not fear to trust to them. They are the higher parts of the complex system—humanity, that raising it above all self, makes the belief in Deity possible, even to the skeptic.

That gentle, timid woman alone with this man, exemplified noblest charity. The control that she exercised over nerves and body, was strength superior to that which is without dreads, without terrors.

She leaned over Oliver, straining her arms and hands to change his head to a more comfortable rest on the pillow, which she had made of her jacket.

While she was still busied with him, a rap at the door made her turn, and welcome the visitor who said "I am the doctor." He was a tall, young-looking man; who when he had struck a match and finding a candle, had glanced at Oliver, took a good look at Mrs. DePew.

With hat off and bright hair somewhat disordered she was well worth looking at. She did not notice that Dr. Baile was giving more attention to her than to Oliver, nor that his eyes were bright with admiration. But then the doctor wore glasses, which so reflected the candle's light, that to Meg his face seemed nothing but a young beard straggling over cheeks, and two shining spots where his eyes were.

Into those shining spots she gazed so earnestly, that Dr. Baile's face flushed almost as red as his

straggly beard. It was to him a very romantic incident, this midnight meeting in a lonely cabin, with a beautiful young woman. That she had a husband, did not lessen the attraction; for in this free camp, husbands were easily-disposed-of difficulties, and it was whispered that hers had deserted her.

"Ahem! Mrs. DePew I believe;" his hand holding the candle shook so with his pleasurable excitement that a drop of the hot sperm fell on Oliver's wrist, whose moan drew Meg's attention to it.

"He will live!" she joyfully exclaimed; "see how sensitive he still is. Ah, doctor!" again those lovely eyes were fixed on his shining glasses, "I was trembling lest you should say you thought he could not be saved!"

"Is—is he then of so much value?" asked the doctor with a twinge of jealousy.

"Indeed he is! He is my husband's friend!" Meg's all-sufficient reason given as artlessly as a child, was a blow to Dr. Baile's vanity. He did not reply, and she went on.

"Besides he is old, alone, has had a hard life, and while we believe that the other is the better world, yet we like to know that people have had some pleasure in this. But, oh! doctor," clasping her hands with a little gesture of entreaty that was one of her most bewitching ways, "look to him, do not stop to listen to me."

"Ah!" sighed the doctor. Then as Meg took the candle he undid the bandages and examined the wounds. The one near the heart was long but not deep. That in the leg was the worse, but neither were dangerous except for the probable fatal loss of blood. This, after extracting the ball, was the medical opinion, which, delivered to Meg, raised her hopes.

"Did he bleed much?" asked Dr. Baile, glad of the opportunity to look again at this pretty woman.

"I don't know," she answered. "When I found him he was lying unconscious, both wounds were bleeding, but not profusely. But I am strong with hope. He will get well. Poor Mr. Oliver. He will get well, and yet have some happiness."

The doctor remained until a man came to summon him.

"We have them out," he said. Excusing himself Dr. Baile took his departure, saying he would call the next morning, and not until then did Meg wonder how it was possible the doctor had been so near, and who were those the man said "they had out."

She had not much leisure to indulge her surmises, for Oliver, beginning grow feverish, required her constant care, and she was no experienced nurse who knew how to save herself. Filled with her charity and tenderness she occupied every moment helping him. Bathing his head, moistening his lips, smoothing his rough hands with her soft ones, until toward dawn, he rested quietly, and Meg, sitting on one of those tree chairs, with her head against the wall, fell fast asleep.

There were wounded men in another cabin, not far from Oliver's. The two miners who had joked away the hours of watching their chance to kill the old man, were more grievously wounded than their victim. Wounded too, without intent or malice, for the barricade defended by giant powder was not made for the destruction of life, but to so obstruct the workings of the "Stillwater" company that days would be necessary to remove the debris, in which time if De Pew arrived, the "Bullfinch" ground would be measured and reported, an injunction would of necessity be granted, and further robbery prevented.

With all his swearing and disbelief of souls, Oliver would not have fired that battery against man, save only they had, despite warning, determined to force the siege; even then, with his naturally kind

heart, it is doubtful if he would have been willing to defend his rights by such frightful loss of life as would have occurred. When the voices of his intended murderers had, by favorable breeze, reached him through the night's stillness, his thoughts had been only of De Pew and his rights. And his last conscious moment was one of satisfaction, that now "Charley" would fight out his fight and enjoy his rights; the injuries to Oliver's assailants being the result of the time lost in altercation which brought them to the tunnel's mouth at the very instant that the dull fire of the lighted fuse had reached the powder.

But Deadwood would not believe this. At least part of Deadwood, for the town was arrayed against itself, half being for the two intentional murderers, one of whom blinded for life with battered head hung on the verge of that eternity to which he had sworn to send another, and his confederate with one leg wrenched off, and one arm useless, was suffering torture and conscious through it all. Half of Deadwood was so thoroughly for these injured men, that had it been the rougher, wilder half, there would have been lynching and vengeance meditated. And such a flaming reception ready for the absent DePew, that Meg's heart would have been broken.

Fortunately, however, for Meg, the rough inhabitants of Deadwood were almost unanimously for her, and her side. They stood in knots on Main Street discussing the "sitiwation," and the miner who, bareheaded, had rushed down to the "Stillwater" foreman with the news "thet thet ole varmint hed blowed up their mine and killed their watchmen," had become Oliver's greatest ally. The old man lying dead, covered with the crime of wholesale murder, was not the same as that "poor, lonely, hard-working man, the rich were trying to rob," as Meg described him, when at sunrise with a pillow

under each arm, the miner had stopped respectfully at the door of Oliver's cabin, which, in all its existence, had never held any thing half so lovely as that sleeping girl, whose bright hair seemed a nimbus of light against the dingy wall.

"My! But she are a beauty! And a good 'un! Look! never even took off her collar nor loosed the button at her throat." The miner moved his own throat, that felt the oppression of the loose flannel shirt. He looked at Oliver who was quietly resting, and then putting the pillow on the floor was going away, when Meg with a blush beautiful as morning, wakened, went to the door, thanked him for his goodness, and offering him her hand to shake, told him "God would reward him for his kindness to a poor, lonely old man, the rich were trying to rob." For a moment or two the rough fellow was so overpowered that he could not speak. But a miner has a good deal of self-possession, and is generally gifted with an inquiring mind, so after a silence of pleasure he asked, "Missus, I'd like to know how that ole man fired off such a lot o' powder. He's a nigh killed two fellows, an' ef it warn't fer luck, might ha' killed more."

"Is any one killed?" Meg exclaimed, turning pale.

"Oh, don't worry about them, missus, p'raps I was just a-lyin' ter hear myself talk. But ef you ken, answer my question, fer," in a whisper, "thar be some in Deadwood, that is tryin' ter stir up a feelin', and the burnin' fuse hez been traced ter whar he lay."

"Indeed," said Meg earnestly, "I don't know how it happened. But this I do know, that the second barricade where powder was placed, was within the Bullfinch ground. That it was to be fired only to obstruct work, and prevent further robbery of ore, until the officer could measure the ground. And that, when I arrived here I found this ole man man apparently dead. Shot twice, see, here are the

bullets! Some one must have tried to kill him. If there are two men injured by the explosion, they, if they fired, must have done so, before they were injured. And how, if wounded, could Mr. Oliver have fired the fuse!"

"Wal, it's all strange," said the miner, looking perplexed. Then brightening, "May I jest lay the case afore the body o' miners? It's in your interest, missus! Feelin' runs high, an'—an' it's ter the advantage o'—o' yer husband, that he should hev a few on his side."

The peculiar meaning thrown on the word "husband" frightened away Meg's roses. She turned white as snow.

"Oh!" she said, clasping her hands and looking as "purty as a peach," as the miner afterward described her, "Oh! my husband is the noblest and truest man in the world. No one could know him and not love him."

"Wal, missus, I may jest state the matter for his side?" the miner asked again.

Meg hesitated, then with childlike confidence that gained the miner's entire fealty, "Tell what you think is best," she said. "But we have a law case. You are a miner and know more of law than I do, so pray do not say any thing that will injure our side."

"I won't, missus. Yer ken trust me." Then with vanity and admiration both enlisted, he hurried off to Deadwood, and before sunset had so described the "murder o' the pore ole man," so harangued his brother miners, and inveighed against the "robbery o' the rich," that, with very few exceptions, the whole mining population were, once and forever, "For Oliver and DePew!"

Feeling ran high. The gambling saloons were thronged with excited talkers, the bands played warlike airs, and gold being the nearest to Meg's hair, there were so many nuggets taken to the jeweler's

for pins, and so many displayed by the promenaders on Main Street, that when toward night a horse raced into Deadwood, its rider called out to a crowd of fellows with shining badges:

"I say, boys, what's the row? Have you all turned women that you are stuck over with pins and jewelry?"

"Women?" one cried, and then before answering called, "Here's three chairs for golden hairs!" which original poetry aroused such enthusiasm that three times three the cheers were roared, silencing the noisy bands, while, tossing her hat on the back of her head, and leaning one elbow on the high Mexican saddle she rode man-fashion, Calamity Jane laughed until her white teeth gleamed in her dark face.

She ceased laughing, listening earnestly when, crowding around, holding out their hands with the word "shake," the men told her of the attempted murder of Oliver, the explosion at the tunnel, the injury to the two assassins, and lastly, most enthusiastically, of Meg herself.

"Thar she stays way up in thet ole cabin, cookin' fer, an' nussin', an' tendin' that pore ole lonely man, as the rich is tryin' ter rob. An' not satisfied o' thet, they declars thet thar's suthin' evil awaitin' her husband, es she sez herself, es is a fust-class feller! So es we wants ter know who's fer us an' who's aginst us, why jest 'cause her hair's thet nice yaller, we wears the nuggets o' gold."

"That's it, is it!" And Calamity laughed again. "So she's a hero, even if she didn't mean to be! Here, boys," she tossed a twenty-dollar gold piece into the crowd, "let me buy one of those pins. I can't wait to have one made—I'm with you, heart and soul! You may count on Calamity Jane!"

She caught the pin thrown to her, fastened it in her hat, and shouting back:

"Meet me at midnight at Madam Mustache's.

I'll play for a hundred a hand!" put spurs to her horse and dashed out of town the way she had entered.

"She's a wild 'un! Man or ooman? Who ken tell? Wi' the face o' a girl, an' the strength o' a man, an' more darin' than both on 'em tergither. But no badness in her, no meanness. That's Calamity! Here's one fer *her!*" So agreed the men, and being in the mood for cheers, they gave her one, good and hearty. And then, "jest fer luck," treated drinks, and held themselves ready to meet Calamity at the high game in the saloon of Madame Mustache at midnight.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN OLIVER'S CABIN.

WHILE the miners were cheering her, Calamity, having cleared the town, turned her horse's head toward the mountains, and over stones, loose rocks, jumping across gullies, on a trail none but Indians dared use, made her way toward the gulch where lay the Bullfinch.

It was dark, for the moon was growing late of rising. But darkness did not hinder the fearless rider and her good horse. They had taken many trips together; trips of such great peril that the mere falling down a precipice, or being dashed to pieces by rolling rocks, seemed as nothing.

These were dangers that did not enter the rider's thoughts. As for the horse, when that light body was upon him, those firm hands guiding his reins, he had but one duty, obedience.

An obedience gladly rendered. With proud neck arching, nostrils swelling, and sensitive ears erect or lying back, as he felt the danger he was braving for his rider's sake, he obeyed her slightest touch.

There's something human in the sympathy of a horse for its constant rider. The beautiful bay that carried Calamity over so many miles seemed to know her very moods, and now as in the darkness, with head bended forward and eyes fixed in thought, she slackened the reins, the horse stepped softly, as if he would not be the one to disturb her. It was not pleasant meditation, for there was no smile on her pretty mouth, and every once in a while a great sigh swelled out her breast, until the twinkling light

of Oliver's cabin shone before her like a star and dispelled her thoughts. She rose in her stirrups, kissing her hand to it, then touching her horse with spurs, he bounded onward as she called:

"On, Desmond, old fellow. She waits for us there!"

Far enough away, so as not to disturb Meg by unusual noise, she sprang to the ground, and taking off the bridle, said to the horse as one would to a faithful dog: "Wait for me, Desmond," left him to enjoy the sweet grass that in this unusually warm autumn, still abounded among the rocks. Loosening the strap that secured her rifle to her shoulders, she leaned the weapon against a tree, on whose branch hanging the bridle, she noiselessly climbed toward the cabin, where for three nights and two days Meg had watched beside the unconscious Oliver.

The old man's life hung by a thread, and Meg passed anxious wearing hours. Hours that but for this sacred duty, tending the sick, would have been fuller of agony. Nine days gone, and not one word from her husband. She was thankful for the weariness of her body, thankful for the constant attention the sick man needed, only these kept her from madness, as morning and evening one or other of the miners would call to bring her the news and the papers.

"He's not yet come, but soon, I guess!" they would say, meaning her husband, and she, forcing her lips to smile, would answer:

"I know he will come as soon as he can."

She had not heard that badges were worn in her honor, nor that her name was lauded and abused by the different factions in the town. She did not know that her husband had been threatened, and that a party of men paraded the streets to protect him.

She knew none of these things, nor that the most fortunate accident that could occur was DePew's

delayed arrival. For, with his fearless, impetuous nature, a fight and a desperate one, would have resulted, had he ridden into Deadwood while feeling ran so high as during the two days following the tragic events at the Bullfinch.

She knew none of this, while pale as a lily, she tenderly cared for the old man, who probably not even in infancy had been so watched, so nursed.

Outside in the darkness Calamity looked at her through the small window.

"How soft and fair she is, so tender that I could crush her in my arms." She hugged her arms about her own body as she spoke, catching her breath with a gasp and saying, "So tender, that she has changed me! My wildness is but sham, my laugh is hollow, my heart cries out for love—love!"

She pressed her hands to her breast, forcing back a sob, she clinched her teeth, stepping away as she felt it bursting forth.

It came, she curled her lips at it, forced a laugh over it, tossed her hat in the air and pressed her hand against her aching heart as she muttered bitterly:

"Love! love! who will give it to a vagabond?"

Then again she went to the cabin, not trusting herself to look in the window, and tapped at the door, and asked, "May I come in?"

The days and nights passed in Oliver's cabin had taught Meg she had nothing to fear from even the roughest man in Deadwood. Her visitors had been so frequent, including the doctor with his shining glasses, that she did not start or tremble at this knock or voice.

Walking across the room she opened the door, and when she saw the dark face, hanging hair, and strange eyes of Calamity Jane, she did what perhaps no other woman would have done to that notorious character, "Jane!" she exclaimed eagerly, clasping both hands, "Jane, I am thankful to see you!"

Then, as Calamity whispered, "Come out in the air," she put her arms about the vagabond's neck and leaning her head on her breast, wept in the most unheroic way.

Calamity did not speak, did not make a sound, though her face was twitching with excitement she did not even tremble, as gently supporting the weeping Meg, she waited for a moment before saying softly:

"Sweet soul, do not worry; your husband is safe and well. I came here to tell you—and to see you again," she added.

"Safe!" at this relief Meg grew faint, staggered, would have fallen but for the strong, slender arm upholding her.

"Rest here a moment, I will bring you water," and Calamity led her to a rock near a tree, then running to the little creek, returned with a cup of water, just as the moon, peeping over the mountain, looked down on them, making Meg's face whiter, with its silvery light, and throwing a halo around the slight figure of Calamity Jane, as she bended over her.

Daylight and darkness. The two might have stood for the picture as thus close together, bound by one of those irresistible natural attractions, they were of each other the antipodes.

Meg, gentle, timid, loving, whose strength was of spirit, of soul, and that wild, reckless creature, breaking laws as she would snap a straw, laughing at dangers that men would but care to face; yet with a passionate heart; calling out in the wilderness of her life. Tender too, for now, as Meg rose saying, "I must go back to the cabin, I dare not leave him alone, come you with me, Jane? It may seem strange, yet so it is, that except my husband, no one touches my heart, rouses my interest, as you do, Jane!" She pressed her to her breast, "Oh! sweet soul!" Calamity shivered as the words came forth, and trembled as she caught Meg's soft breath, and

then, pulling herself away, kissed both of the white hands that Meg had clasped about hers.

Side by side they walked the few steps, neither speaking until in the cabin, Meg having assured herself that Oliver was still comfortably resting, Calamity beckoned her to the door.

"Come where I can feel the air, see the stars," she said. "In my blood there is a wildness that abhors restraint."

And when Meg took the seat Calamity had pulled near, there came over the dark, upturned face a tenderness that made even the moon love to linger on it.

She had thrown her hat to the ground, tossed back her long hair, and with her arms lying beside her, was grace itself, as she rested at Meg's feet.

"Tell me, Jane," asked Meg, "when was it you saw my husband? Where was he? Will he soon be home?"

One question followed too swift upon another for Calamity to interrupt. Nor did she attempt to, for with her strange eyes softened by feeling, and her pretty lips parted, she was content to look and listen. Even when Meg waited for answers, she had to rouse herself to speak, losing the languor of her pose as she folded her arms on her breast, and turning her eyes from Meg's face, looked into the night, frowning at some thought.

But there was no vexation in the full voice when she replied:

"I did not say I saw him, but that I came to Deadwood to tell you he was well. The one who did see him, met him on the road, riding a much-jaded horse. For, without success, he had been seeking to catch up with the officer commissioned by the court to measure off the Bullfinch ground. Catch up with him!" Calamity's lip curled, her eyes flashed scorn. She sprang to her feet, clinching the hand she raised above her head. "How could

he ever have caught up to him, when rich gentlemen were taking him from camp to camp, keeping him by bribes from fulfilling his duty, until their tools could, by the taking off of that old man, give them the mine without contestants! Yet these are gentlemen! These are honorable men! These robbers, these murderers! While I, who would rather burn off my hand than take from the poor, I am under a ban; hunted, shot at, and if identified, sent to the penitentiary! This is law! This—justice!"

The low, thrilling voice, the intense utterance, pierced Meg's heart. She rose like one magnetized, came near to the dark figure, and at the last words, shuddering, put her hand on Calamity's shoulder.

"Oh, not that! not that!" she moaned. "Dear Jane, do not commit crime. I can not rest if I must think of you as a criminal, hunted by the law's officers."

"Sweet soul!" Calamity was smiling as one might to reassure a child, "do not wear out your peace worrying for me. Aha!" with a light laugh, "be assured no officer of the law will catch me, any more than thus reaching out my hand I can catch and hold the wind."

"But then the crime, dear Jane, the crime. Laws are for the protection of society, the advancement of civilization; and to break them makes us criminals to ourselves, to our God, even though by the courts we be not convicted."

Calamity frowned, her eyes flashed, she moved restlessly under the light hand resting on her shoulder. She turned to speak, but biting her lip was silent, while Meg went on softly and slowly:

"You said once before, that for the repentant, for such as you, there was no home, no refuge. I would I could take you to mine. I would I could say, 'Sister, what I have is thine as well.' I can not do that just now—not just now. But it will come,

without a question or a doubt! I believe that yet I can share with you what is mine. In the meantime, there will be friends made for you. My husband will write to people far better off in this world's wealth than we, who will be glad to help you! Jane, dear Jane."

In her earnestness, Meg had clasped her hands, and Calamity, with arms folded on her breast, stood a step away, gazing at her, murmuring:

"Sweet soul! Sweet, sweet soul! So you have asked your husband to take me in, and he has refused. Sweet soul, I thank you! And for him. Ha! ha! He has done what any other man would do. Perhaps were I in his place I might do it myself. I can not tell."

She pressed her hand to her head, as if to crush some thought, and then spoke again, straightening herself proudly:

"As for those rich friends who would parade me as a western curiosity, I want none of *their* help. To you, Meg DePew, I am humble, because before your pure soul, your truth and virtue, I bow almost in worship. But for the world that punishes crime, yet in secret is the greatest criminal; to the rich, whose gold is amassed by wronging some fellow-creature, either by deceitful bargaining or false statement; for that world of Pharisees, I, Calamity Jane, feel but scorn! For them, I say, I may be a vagabond, but I am no charlatan, no cheat, no liar! Farewell, Meg! With your sweetness, your tenderness, you unnerve me. You drive me from the life that with its perils amused me; and yet, oh, angel, you can not give me what might bring to me peace—joy!"

She sprang away as if to leave, then came near to Meg, speaking hurriedly:

"Your husband will be in Deadwood within two days. He succeeded in finding the officer. He is well and in high spirits. Before you both there lies

the path of peace and happiness, and of all who desire good for you, there is not one who for it, to assure it to you, would sacrifice as much as I. Think of me sometimes, and believe, were the world as true, as good as you, *I* would not be Calamity Jane."

"You are not going away forever! I shall see you again! Oh, let me have another chance to speak with my husband!" pleaded Meg.

Her weak hands held to Calamity, who, taking them, kissed them in the boyish way that seemed most natural to her.

"I can not tell," she said sadly. "I may not see you again, yet I may. Strong as we believe ourselves, we are powerless when once we love; and I do love you, more than Eve loved her paradise, more than a saint his heaven. Meg!" She threw her arms about her, straining her to her breast, "My heaven, my paradise, farewell!"

Then, with a few light springs, she was out of sight. Whistling softly, her horse came to her, rubbing his nose on her shoulder.

"Old fellow, we are both fools, for we both love what can never be ours." She whispered the words while putting on his bridle, then, without noticing the tears that filled her eyes, she sprang to the saddle, put spurs to her horse, and more recklessly than she had ridden up, raced down the mountains, leaping gullies, risking her life at each dangerous pass. But for her, the dangers only steadied nerve, bringing a warm glow to her cheeks, a brilliancy to her eyes, that made them glitter like diamonds, when, walking into the saloon of Madame Mustache, she threw a handful of gold on the table, where the party awaited her.

"I'm ready, boys," she said, and as the clock struck twelve, Madame Mustache, the fat little French woman, proprietor of the place, began to deal the cards.

She was one of the characters of Deadwood, this Madame Mustache, whose name was given because of the hirsute adornment to which most women object. Madame Mustache accepted hers as a species of beauty, for, attracting customers, it made her saloon one of the most successful in the camp.

"It do advertise me," she would say, with her little French shrug, sweeping in the dollars and growing rich, and, like many rich, not caring how, only so she gained riches.

She dealt the cards to-night in the high game Calamity introduced, winning, too, as Calamity generally did, and then, with her reckless, free-handed way, tossing part of her winnings to the only married man of the party. "For your wife," she said. "Remember, for your wife," and the donor, not being one to be trifled with, the wife made that much clear of this night of high games, while Calamity, having "treated all round," mounted her horse, called "good-night," and was soon out on the desolate plains.

"Whar do she go? Whar do she live? How do she get all this money she throws round?" asked the men, who had congregated in a little group to see her off.

"What's that ter yer?" said a big fellow who had stopped too, and had admired Calamity's pretty foot and ankle as she sprang to her saddle. "She don't take nothin' o' yer, do she? An' always a-treatin'! P'r'aps," with a laugh, "p'r'aps she hev a gold mine out yonder that she keeps private."

No one answered, and presently the crowd dispersed, for they were not ready to knock the chip off the intruder's shoulder.

The next afternoon the stage came in with news of the great robbery of the down coach a hundred miles out from Deadwood. The messenger was wounded, for the express company sent guards with its treasure box, which guards were called messengers.

This messenger happened to be a plucky fellow, and would not surrender. He was about to be killed, when that dare-devil Charley called out: "Pray leave him to me. I'll settle that little difficulty." He fired, and the messenger fell. The box was robbed, the passengers searched, but only when the robbers had disappeared did the passengers find out that the bullet from Charley's rifle had been so nicely aimed, that it had grazed the head, cut off a piece of the ear, stunning the guard, but not seriously injuring him.

He came to himself swearing vengeance against Charley. "This time I recognized him, and the next time I'll be quick enough to kill him," he said to the driver, who replied:

"Why, man, he saved your life. The others would have aimed at your heart." But the messenger held to his resolution, claiming:

"Be that as it may, Charley dies by my hand."

A few moments later, hardly a half hour, the up coach was met, and thus brought the news to Deadwood, where "Charley's" exploits became the day's topic.

"A hunderd miles out! Then Calamity couldn't hev been thar!" said one of the men, with whom at midnight she had been playing cards. "P'r'aps we're wrongin' her. P'r'aps she don't belong to the band. At any rate, she's a fust-class gal. I ain't so sure but what I'd marry her ef she asked me, even ef she do go a-playin' agent."

"Gal! How do yer know she's a gal? With her purty face and darin' ways, she's as much one as t'other," his friend replied, and they both agreed that:

"Wal, wal! She's allus fair, so here's to her."

CHAPTER XIV.

A LONG RIDE.

IT was a long, a tedious ride, upon which, bidding Meg to be of "Good cheer," DePew started. He looked back to see her face before he turned off Main Street into the mountain road, that led to various camps, which, borrowing some of Deadwood's glory, had started into active life.

He had made no inquiries before leaving Deadwood, being too clever to let his plans be known. They were suspected, however, for when he arrived at Sunset, where the officer was reported to be, he had gone fifty miles off to a ranch, and when that was reached, he had just left. And so for six days DePew followed the officer, believing himself befooled, and yet unable to gain reliable information. And in a wild country like this, equally unable to prevent the spiriting away of the man whose services were so indispensable to him, it was a very expensive trip, for his horse soon gave out. Indeed, there were few horses that could stand the long stretches between camps. On the seventh morning, having by a strategam learned that the officer had gone to Rapid City to report upon a claim under litigation, DePew, with a fresh horse, started for the destined point. He had always believed himself a judge of horseflesh, a match for any jockeying trick; but when ten miles on his journey, the strong-looking, well-made animal he had bought utterly failed, and taken with cramps, rolled over in the sand, he felt that not only had he been fooled, but that he was in a predicament to make even a Job lose patience,

Ten miles from anywhere! Sand under foot, sand flying in clouds about him, sand obscuring even the sky, as, whirled by the wind it raised itself in suffocating pillars, whose ambition was to bury him out of sight.

"Well!" he exclaimed, when a momentary lull in the tempest of sand and wind enabled him to clear his eyes from the dust which seemed to have chosen them for a permanent resting-place, "this is a position where swearing is too tame and weak for the expression of what a fellow feels! Here, you disappointing beast, get up and carry me at least back to your master's, for his you are, never mine again. The scoundrel, to sell such a horse to a man to cross a desert! The law should put him in the penitentiary for life. The law!"—with scorn—"I am growing disgusted with my profession, for there are so many turns, quibbles and outlets for thieves in the law, that those it punishes are generally the least guilty. What will the law do to those men who have been robbing the Bullfinch perhaps of hundreds of thousands, stealing from an honest old fellow? What will the law do to them? Nothing! We'll be lucky if we can force the officer to measure the ground, and keep the rest of it from their greedy fingers. Talk about road agents and highway robbers! I think they are the better fellows. For my part, I'd rather join the road agents than do as those men have done, or sell to a stranger such a worthless brute as that. There's something daring about those agents. But villains like these, that can hide themselves behind subterfuges, are devilish!"

Seated on a mound of sand, before him nothing but the desert and that kicking, rolling horse, DePew had a fine opportunity for moralizing. There were only two things he could do, moralize or foot back the ten miles he had already gained, and thus have lost time. Hoping each moment that the horse would wear out his colic, and be fit for travel, DePew

might have moralized *ad infinitum*, but that just as he had delivered his opinion aloud, with a decided verdict in favor of what he had always bitterly opposed—highway robbery—there sounded near him a merry laugh.

Robinson Crusoe was not more ready to welcome his Man Friday than the aristocratic Charles DePew any waif the desert might bring to him. Turning quickly at the laugh, he saw seated on a horse a young fellow whose age might be anywhere from fifteen to twenty, for, covered with dust, all that was visible was the boyish figure, beardless face and blue eyes. Clad in canvas, where blue gleamed here and there through the heavy coating of alkali, he was probably a rancher's son. But the horse he rode was so fine an animal no dust could hide his beauty. DePew looked at the glorious creature with desireful eyes, as he said pleasantly to his rider:

"Young man, you have never been taught your Bible, or you would not laugh at the misfortunes of another."

"And you, sir," said the young fellow, saucily, "if you have learned yours, should be careful how you 'scandalize little ones.' I heard what you said about those whom the Westerners politely call 'agents,' and the Easterners 'highway robbers.'"

As soon as he had spoken, possibly uncertain how his words would be taken, or else with youthful vanity anxious to show his horsemanship, the new-comer put spurs to his horse, making him curvet, and in each movement showing off his fine points as he danced around the miserable-looking animal that, over his colic, stood with dejected head nearly to the ground, representing in melancholy satire DePew's sole means of locomotion. The contrast between the two horses was so great that DePew laughed; at which signal of amiability, with a wild, shrill cry of "whoop!" the boy raised himself in his stirrups, backed his horse, and calling "Now!"

bounded over the sick animal that stood between him and DePew, and there for a moment held his horse motionless on his hind feet in the most difficult of equestrian poses.

So easily and gracefully had he accomplished the feat that he well-merited DePew's hearty "Bravo!" at which, with a laugh, he doffed his cap, bowed low, and kissed his hand.

"Now we're at the Great American Circus! See what a ring one has here," he cried, as if to cover the boyish vanity sparkling in his eyes; and then springing to the ground with arms folded, leaned against the beautiful brute he had been riding.

On his feet he appeared so much smaller and younger that when, with an assumption of mannishness, he looked up and said, "DePew, you are a right good fellow," DePew bowed gravely, hiding his smile at the youngster's airs, as he said:

"You have the advantage in knowing my name, but even without learning yours I am pleased, sir, to meet with your favor."

Just then, of all things, DePew desired to propitiate the boy, for thus he might be able to hire that fine animal, or induce him on it to go to the rancher's who had cheated him in his morning's purchase, and bring him out a substitute for that miserable beast hardly able to stand even now.

The boy must have divined his thought, for still aping man's way, he went on:

"Yes, a right good fellow. Now, you want my horse to ride to Rapid City, yet though you are much stronger and taller than I, and we are alone, you don't attempt to take him. I'll make a bargain with you. Catch me, and I will lend you this friend of mine. You can start at once and bring back the officer to Deadwood."

With head to one side he awaited an answer, while DePew, rather startled at the fact that his private business was certainly public as far as this boy

was concerned, began to wonder who he was. He could not remember any one resembling him, neither in Deadwood nor at the ranches or camps which he had sometimes visited. While he was thinking over the matter the boy grew impatient.

"Hurry up," he said. "You want to get in. Catch me, take the horse, I will follow on yours, and you will be in time." He was twirling his cap in his hand, boy fashion, and with his curly head bared, seemed scarcely out of childhood.

"Look here, youngster," DePew laughed at him, for there was something so mirth-provoking in the little fellow, "it seems to me you are trying to tempt me to become a highway robber." And then seriously, "I don't know whose horse you are riding, nor how any one would trust a child like you to ride over a desert. But if you have a right to hire me that horse, I will pay you whatever price you ask, and if in boyish folly you have taken what does not belong to you, I will still pay you a handsome sum, ride the horse to Rapid City, see that it is returned to its owner, and that no questions are asked."

The boy's answer to this was a burst of laughter so hearty that the tears stood in his eyes—

"O—ho! O—ho!" he shouted, holding his sides, doubling over with laughter until his hat dropped at his feet. "O—ho! O—ho! If I live through this, laughter can never kill me."

"Boy, I am sorry to see such a nice little fellow find amusement in a possible theft." DePew spoke very seriously, for, taking in consideration the child's costume, appearance, and general education, he had decided he was a school-boy off on a frolic. That he could afford to ride, or if even the child of wealth, would be allowed to ride, such a magnificent animal, he did not believe. Yet the horse knew him, was even now poking his nose into the boy's face. He might be the groom, he might be

any thing. But whatever he was, it certainly was out of place that a proposition such as had been made, should be received with such uproarious laughter.

The boy however thought differently, for he laughed and laughed, until with a sigh, "There, I'm laughed out," he exclaimed. And then to DePew: "How serious you are. It is thus always in life. What makes one laugh brings grief to another. Now it has been rather a serious matter to you that for six days you have been chasing over the country after a man who has always just left the place where you hoped to find him! Yet he laughs over it. We two just roared over it! It was really very very funny as he told it."

"Where?" asked DePew, frowning, and biting at his mustache.

"At Rapid City this morning," coolly replied the boy.

"At Rapid City! This morning! Why Rapid City is fifteen miles away, and," looking at his watch, "it is now only half past eight. How could you have come that distance by this hour, and yet have seen and talked with the officer." DePew was growing mystified.

"Perhaps I hurried out specially to see you. Perhaps I wanted a fellow to have fair play." The boy winked his eyes roguishly, looking as pretty as a mischievous child. Then drawing himself up and holding down his chin in pompous fashion, he went on:

"But to convince you, I will tell you how nicely your opponents had it all arranged. You left Deadwood seven mornings ago. In the stable two hostlers were having a dispute over a matter in which the officer you sought was interested. 'I'll tell him if I have to walk to the camp myself,' said one, mentioning the camp. Then you, Charles DePew, started for that camp. That hostler followed you,

headed you off, warned the men who employed him for the work, and the officer was taken to another place, distant fifty miles. When you arrived he had just left in the morning. His destination, was, however, told to you, and before dawn you started, determined to be there. Yet you missed him! And so it has been day in and day out. They were too many for you! They knew the country; you are a stranger. I am sorry for you. For so it will be again, unless you can get this horse which is mine, as surely as your wife is yours."

DePew, who had been listening as the boy related correctly his annoying experiences, started when his wife was mentioned.

"Child," he said, sternly, "who you are, or how you have learned all you know is a mystery to me. But learn this, that a man's wife is so sacred, that no stranger must allude lightly to her."

Unintentionally DePew stepped nearer the boy, when without effort his horse took a side spring, the boy moving backward with him, and both were at the same distance as formerly; that is within reach of DePew's outstretched hand, but no nearer.

"I intended no disrespect to Mrs. DePew." There was no laughter now in the boy's eyes. "When I said this horse was as much mine, I wanted it known that as she is bound to you by her devotion, so is this horse to me. I will prove it. There, take him if you can! Ride him to Rapid City in time to catch the officer. He is the only horse that can make that distance in time, and the officer before an hour will have left that camp."

He stepped aside, leaving the horse for DePew, who, accustomed to horses, came gently toward him. The beautiful animal, for in spite of the dust that dulled and streaked his smooth skin, he was most beautiful, raised his head, looked at DePew, perfectly motionless until he reached for the bridle, when with a quick spring the horse stood four feet

away. This repeated several times, DePew shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"Child, I have no tlme for tricks. Lend me your horse and I will pay what you like."

"Well," said the boy, his eyes again twinkling as he leaned against the horse that had come back to him and was rubbing its head on the hand he held out caressingly, "Well, you're such a big fellow, and I am so little, then you are active too and strong, just catch me to humor me and you shall mount this horse, to ride which, no money could buy for any one."

It was such a simple thing to catch the boy within the length of his arm, and to ride that horse was so necessary that DePew, who was both athletic and strong, measured the distance, and by this time prepared for the boy's tricks, held his arms down, and without warning, sprang upon the spot where the boy stood.

The boy was not there, however, for quicker even than DePew he had clasped the neck of his horse and off shot the creature, carrying his master so far away that they were hidden in the dust.

If ever a man felt like swearing it was DePew, and that he restrained himself was due not to his own manly self-control, for doubtless no manly fellow would have thought the less of him had he burst forth in a good volley of healthy oaths. But somehow, as his anger rose, he thought of his wife, of her weary days alone and how uncomplainingly she bore them. He knew this, and with this knowledge of her there came a shame that he should do less with the ills that fell to him. So he mounted the horse that was as jaded as if it had measured fifty in place of ten miles.

"Well," said DePew, "a man may fail, but I suppose there's a sort of comfort in doing one's duty. It is trying though, to be made a plaything of by a child. I suppose I shall miss the officer after all."

He had not ridden more than a few yards when dashing up to him came the boy. "Off, youngster, I've had enough of you," said DePew, waving him aside.

"No, you haven't," replied the boy. "Don't be ridiculous. I came back to lend you my horse," then pulling out a pistol and pointing it at his own breast, "There! I swear to shoot myself unless he lets you mount him," he sprang to the ground holding the pistol still pointed to his breast.

"Take it away, child, don't play with fire-arms," said DePew. And then when the boy kept it at his breast saying, melo-dramatically, "Mount the horse, catch the officer, or my blood be upon your head," waving one hand in the air as scenic heroes do, DePew, beginning to believe that the little fellow's brain was turned by novel reading, hesitatedto leave him on the desert. Still the offer of the horse was very tempting, the necessity to reach Rapid City very great.

"Young man!" he said, "I do not like to borrow your animal, and leave you with that unfortunate one; you are small and light, couldn't you mount behind?"

"I could, but I won't!" the boy replied stoutly and with a touch of impatience, that made him again look pretty as a willful child, "Hurry up! I'm tired of holding this pistol."

"All right," said DePew, "I accept your kindness, I may never be able to repay it, but I trust I will, so tell me your name!"

"My name," the little fellow hesitated, and watching his blushing face, DePew had quite decided he was some runaway college boy, whose parents might even now be searching for him. He was meditating how after this Bullfinch case was over and he had some leisure, he would seek out this young scamp, and persuade him to return to his home and duties. When suddenly the roguish blue eyes were raised to his as the youngster coolly said:

"You want to know my name? I have so many I was hesitating which to give you. I guess Charley 'll do. Yes, call me Charley. Call pretty loud if you want me to answer. Good-by, don't waste time thinking of me, but ride that friend of mine at full speed, turn him loose just outside of Rapid, go to the saloon-keeper, say you are Mr. DePew and you will find a team ready. Hurry or you'll miss the officer," and without giving DePew a chance for reply, calling to his horse "Be off!" he bounded away, carrying DePew so rapidly and delightfully, that pleasure surmounted all other feelings.

Arrived at Rapid City, he fastened the bridle so it could not entangle his feet, and setting the horse free, saw him start off for the desert as light of foot and plenty of wind as if but just out of the stable.

DePew's appearance at the low building called saloon, caused considerable consternation to three men who drinking at a table did not notice him, until putting his hand on the shoulder of one, he said sternly:

"You are the officer commissioned by the court to measure the Bullfinch ground. The injunction depends upon this measurement, and my client's property upon that injunction. You know this as well as I do, and that you have been paid to keep out of the way. I have found you now, sir, and you never leave my sight until you have done your duty."

The man who had turned pale, regained his color as the two others crowded against DePew, exclaiming, "See here, this is a free country. No bullying here!"

DePew, pushing the men back, grasped the officer's arm. "Come with me," he said, "or I will prosecute you, and make you rue the day you trifled with your duty. Come!"

The officer, a small, timid man, would probably have gone with DePew, when the two stout fellows who had been drinking threw themselves upon him,

and a melée ensued that, despite DePew's forcible and well-directed blows, might have terminated adversely to him, for pistols were pulled, and, winking at the officer, one of the men called, "We'll look arter him," when the door was opened by a nice looking young fellow, who, turning the lock, put the key in his pocket. He was just in time to grab a pistol that one of DePew's assailants was aiming at his back, while in front the other was being considerably punished by DePew's fist.

"You can't kill men in my saloon!" said he who had just entered, and, pointing the pistol at the man from whom he had captured it, he called to DePew:

"Draw yours, sir! Don't trifle with such murderers."

Finding two armed men opposing them, the two roughs made out of the rear entrance, leaving the officer of the court to DePew. Turning to the man whose aid had been so opportune, he said:

"Thank you. I believe I owe my life to you. That fellow had gotten behind without my perceiving him. He would have killed me if you had not entered and come to my help."

"It's nothing, sir — nothing," replied the saloon-keeper. And then, "I believe your name's DePew."

"It is," said DePew.

"Well, sir, the team's ready, and if you'll take my advice, you'll get off at once. The driver's armed; have your pistol convenient."

This, whispered into DePew's ear, took his thoughts back to the boy he had met on the desert.

After thanking the saloon-keeper, "I seem to have had friends," he said.

"Oh, yes, sir!" the man replied, smiling with pleasure. "Charley looked after you."

When DePew put his hand in his pocket to pay a deposit on the team, his money was refused.

"No," said the man; "we trust Charley's friends.

You can settle with the driver at the end of the route."

"Who is this young boy you call Charley?" asked DePew, astonished at the influence he seemed to possess.

"Boy!" The saloon-keeper laughed. "He may be a boy, for all I know, but if he is, he's the brightest, bravest, daringest fellow we, any of us, have seen. It's well to have him on your side, sir."

"I am glad, then, to be for once lucky." DePew laughed, shook hands with the man who had befriended him, and, turning to the officer, who had stood a few feet off during the low conversation, "Come!" he said.

They took their places in a light wagon, that, drawn by two excellent horses, stood at the door, and, in good spirits, DePew turned his face homeward toward Meg.

They were making excellent time. The officer, who was decidedly the worse for liquor, had slipped to the bottom of the wagon asleep, and DePew climbing over the seat took the place beside the driver.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," he said, "for I want to give you Charley's advice. He thought, being as how this is such a wild country, that murders and such like can be conveniently put upon the road agents and the true villains left to escape. Not saying as how the road agents ain't villains, sir. But as I was a-telling you, Charley thought that since so many are against you, that we had better not go the regular road, but strike off through the plains. It'll take three days to reach Deadwood by this route. But if you take it, I can leave you up near the Bullfinch Mine; you can have it measured and every thing settled before your man sees Deadwood, or Deadwood sees him."

"Very well," said DePew, more and more surprised as he heard more of "Charley," and learned

how his own business was known, and luckily for him sympathized with by these strangers. He was tempted to ask again who this "Charley" could be, with the face and person of a lad of seventeen and the good sense of an old man. But he concluded that, dependent as he now was upon the driver's services, it would be poor policy to let him suppose that he knew less of "Charley" than "Charley" knew of him.

They had left the main road and were soon driving across a trackless desert. But, as the wagon was most comfortable, the horses in fine condition, and the driver never uncertain, the riding was not unpleasant.

Two nights camping out, and on the afternoon of the tenth day since his departure DePew looked down a mountain gulch and saw in the distance Oliver's little cabin, near the pretty creek.

"We have arrived," he said to the officer, who had hardly yet sobered up, and required as much help as a woman to reach the ground.

DePew had just steadied him on his feet when the driver' saying, "Good-by," whipped up his horses and started off.

"Stop!" called DePew, "I've not yet paid——"

"Charley'll see to it," the man called back, driving away unconcernedly, while DePew feeling very much as if he were in a dream, or taking part in a fairy pantomime with a godmother named "Charley," made his way to Oliver's cabin.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BULLFINCH IS MEASURED.

"HOW glad the old fellow will be to see me," thought DePew, turning every once in a while to assure himself that that very valuable officer was keeping up with him. Coming to where the trails branched, one going to the creek near the cabin, the other to the "Bullfinch," DePew took the latter, and chancing to see a miner walking leisurely up the gulch, he called to him, deciding that thus to secure an unprejudiced witness to the measurement of Oliver's claim would be of use, should the officer decamp, or attempt any after villainies.

"Are you out of work?" he asked the man when he came up to where he had stopped awaiting him.

"I be," was the answer.

"I will pay you for the day's work, if you will stay here with me and witness this officer's measurements."

"Sartain, sartain," the miner replied.

DePew thought the man looked curiously at him, but, anxious to be through the business in hand, he did not give any attention to the expression of a face that had no interest for him.

He was tempted to enter the tunnel and speak to Oliver, but concluded the outside measurement had better be made, as a few moments, more or less, would not matter much to the old man.

With compass on the ground and tape-line out, the Bullfinch was measured from stake to stake. Fifteen hundred feet long from east to west, six hundred feet wide from north to south.

The tunnel was run in on the claim from the west end which opened on the gulch.

Foot by foot DePew, the miner and the officer made the measurement. The officer making the entry in his book, DePew copying into his, then reading to the miner, he made his mark in both books as witness.

"Now for the inside measurement!" DePew exclaimed, his content shining in his face. For now he would have this tedious affair settled, see his wife, ride over to the camp where the judge was holding court in chambers, have the injunction granted, and afterward the trial, which would soon follow, was but a ceremony, for surely was success theirs.

So full was he of good-humor that he almost shouted out to Oliver, restrained from it solely by the necessity to keep up legal dignity before these two who were with him. He was smiling with pleasure expecting to see the face of Oliver looking at him over the barricade.

Therefore, on entering the tunnel, it was something of a surprise to find the camp raised, and the old man gone. He checked the question which came to his lips. Why should he ask questions of this miner to have them ridiculed in Deadwood? He was no boy to yield to curiosity, or lack control of anxiety, for he was anxious to know what motive could have induced Oliver to desert his post.

He gave no sign of anxiety, however, while again holding the compass and tape-line, as on the outside, with the officer he measured the tunnel. Two hundred feet in they passed the excavated chamber, which was then proven to be on the Bullfinch ground. So it was entered and witnessed on the books of the officer and DePew.

"Now let us measure the width, and you will see that when the 'Stillwater Company' made the curve in its tunnel, they began their trespass on another's property."

Together they measured out the feet; five, ten; but here they were stopped by a confused mass of rocks that entirely filled up the tunnel.

"The powder! It has been fired!"

DePew's astonished whisper reached the officer, who, though living in a mining-camp, was unaccustomed to mines. Befogged now with the liquor he had been drinking, he started at the word "powder."

"Let me out!" he cried, trying to pass DePew, who grabbed his arm with the more emphatic than elegant exclamation:

"Fool!"

"Let me out! I say; I won't stay in a mine with powder!"

"You will stay in this mine until you have done your duty," was DePew's determined answer; which, with his strong grip, finally brought the officer to terms.

Quickly dispatching the work, he hurried away, and was down the gulch, while at the tunnel's mouth DePew paid the miner for his time.

"Who's cabin is that?" he asked, for the first time noticing the cabin that stood near the "Stillwater" tunnel, and had about it evidences of occupancy.

"What!" said the miner surprised. "So yer knows nothin' bout it then? Wal I was thinkin' that fer a young man you took things cool. You asks about that cabin? That's the 'Stillwater' cabin, whar two men shot at ole Oliver."

"Shot Oliver!" DePew turned pale, for Oliver had made no mistake, he had taken a liking, and a great one, to his honest old client.

"Shot him! Wal I should say so." The miner resumed his story with evident relish. "But that ain't the worst o' it. For the mine war fired, both o' the miners war hurted, one is a-dyin' now, and it be said in Deadwood that the best thing Oliver ken do is ter die too. Yes, just as soon as it is settled

he's a-goin' ter live, the 'Stillwater Company' is a-goin' ter bring suit agin him fer obstructin' thar workin's an' killin', or tryin' ter kill two o' thar men. Feelin' run mighty high down ter camp, it's a little easier to-day, kinder wore itself out, but the rich men's jest a-waitin' ter see how Oliver gets on."

"Where's Oliver?" asked DePew.

"Up ter cabin!"

"Thanks, and good-by," said DePew, thinking as he hurried along, "My poor Meg, what you must have suffered! What must you now be suffering! I'll be soon with you, and you will forgive these few moments that I must devote to Oliver." At the cabin door he paused a moment to compose himself, then entering softly, saw in the Sister of Charity attending the wounded, his own Meg.

It was a joyful meeting, joyful, despite the sick man on the bed. And he, as if not to mar the happiness of these two, while yet they were clasped in each other's arms, awoke from his long unconsciousness.

For awhile he lay, weakly trying to remember how he came to be ill, and why "Charley was huggin' his wife in this yer cabin." Then suddenly the facts came back to him, and he gave a weak chuckle.

"It war all fer a drink o' thet derned creek. Two on 'em! Both fired! But I calkerlates I jest piled thet thar tunnel so full o' rocks thet they ain't able ter hev much more taken out."

Oliver's feeble voice brought both husband and wife to his side. They welcomed him back to life with joy: DePew telling him the Bullfinch was measured and the case as good as won, and Meg cautioning silence. While, with tears running down his furrowed cheeks, old Oliver caught both of their hands, and, holding them in a pretty firm grip, for one so reduced by illness, exclaimed:

"Wal! wal! I hez got frien's arter all, frien's arter all!"

While they were still in this happy group, Dr. Baile made his call. He had brushed that straggling beard, and burnished up his glasses, hoping to impress Meg, whose attractions increased until he had begun to grow quite sentimental. His sentimentality received a sad blow now, as Meg's face, radiant with happiness, on his entrance raised itself from her husbands shoulder; and DePew, still holding his arm about her, extended his hand, saying:

"Dr. Baile, my wife has told me of your kindness to our friend."

The doctor turned as red as his beard. It was a blow, a great blow, that instead of being a deserted wife, whom in time he might have been able to console, Mrs. DePew was both happy and beloved. The doctor felt particularly aggrieved, for he had now come to render her a service. Still he was not ill-natured, was easily appeased, though a trifle vain; so, when DePew's welcome was followed by:

"We hope you will soon pull Oliver through, and that you will consider yourself one of our friends, and come to see us when you can spare the time. We don't forget kindness, do we, Meg?" Dr. Baile forgave cruel fate, that had made this lovely creature for another; and, thanking the lucky husband, accepted his invitation.

When his patient had been looked after, and ordered absolute quiet, Dr. Baile requested DePew to walk out for a few moments' conversation.

"I will be back, love," DePew said to his wife.

Meg watched the two from the window, until her husband called her to him and said:

"One of those miners is dying. I am going to take his deposition." He hurried away with the doctor, whose admiration for Mrs. DePew had been turned to practical use. For Dr. Baile, as well as the miner, had heard threats against Oliver; threats which portended something more than the speaking of idle words, as they were made by those citizens

of the camp who had the most influence. Having been first summoned to attend the Stillwater miners, and Oliver having no visible attractions, it is possible Dr. Baile might not have felt called upon to put forth special effort to protect an old man, who had planned, and apparently executed, a wholesale murder. But Mrs. DePew's loveliness and gentle bearing, Mrs. DePew's interest in that "poor old man," added to the fact that her husband had probably deserted her, gone no one knew whither, put a very different aspect on the affair.

The miner who espoused her cause and raised Deadwood for her protection, was no more determined to serve her, than Dr. Baile, with his straggly beard and shining glasses.

He believed that the man whose body had been so torn could not live, and finding him to be of not unkindly nature, and by sufferings aroused to penitence, he encouraged him to relieve his mind of what seemed to oppress it.

The result was a whispered prayer for a priest and a lawyer.

"If I be dyin' I'd like ter make a statement when —when *Jim's* asleep," he whispered.

Jim's sleep was soon managed by Dr. Baile, who sending some one to Deadwood for the first preacher that was struck, went over to Oliver's cabin to tell Mrs. DePew, hoping to win from her a little personal gratitude for this service, which he had intended to convey to her, in a neat speech he had prepared, was done solely for her sake.

Recovered from the shock given him by the certainty of Meg's happy marriage, Dr. Baile, won over by DePew's courtesy, determined to carry out his part of benefactor.

The two entered the little cabin, where asleep, blinded forever, one man was struggling back to life. And the other, whose pains of body mortification had stopped, was trying to make preparation for that

eternal world, which, ever near, is yet farthest from our thoughts.

"I knows you, sir," he said faintly in reply to DePew's kindly words that he was sorry to see him in this condition—"I is sorry for myself. But sence it's a choice o' bein' crippled for life, o' bein' ended, I ain't grieved ter go. Afore I goes I wants yer ter write down what I says, but ter be kinder keerful not to put in any thin' as 'll make it worse for him," turning his eyes toward the bed where slept the blinded Jim.

"Fust, we two comed up ter this cabin havin' taken oath to kill ole Oliver.

"Second, bein' the best shot, an' allus hatin' to be crippled myself, I believes ef he dies, I killed him, 'cause I aimed at his heart.

"Third, I don't so much as surmise that the ole man meant to harm either on us, or any body, fer he told us thet the mine war packed with giant, it would hev ter be fired to prevent work, an' he giv' the warnin' ter save life. Moreover he hed a sign written. I ken read, an' I read it ter all the fellers, warnin' us not ter enter. An' ter prove that he had no malice agin us, nor no evil ter none, he said he'd give us a job when he got his legal rights.

"Fourth, we shot him at night, when he stole out ter git a drink. We sarched his cabin an' lost a heap o' time talkin' afore we started down, so war just thar ter catch the blast." Very faintly spoken, but each word clear, the deposition was made, signed, witnessed, before the priest entered.

"I war allus well brought up," said the dying man to DePew, as if apologizing for his weakness in wanting at this last hour a man of God.

With kind expressions they left him with the priest who had been trying to do good work in this wild camp. An hour or so later the miner was dead, and the publication a few days afterward of his dying deposition created a revulsion in favor of Oliver.

He became the hero. His virtues and perseverance were extolled, and when later on the case was called and Oliver, pale, thin, and crippled, was helped into court, the crowd of spectators gave him a rousing welcome, and what was more to the point, the judge rendered the decision in his favor.

There was no prosecution of the murderers, for the crime could not be traced beyond the two miners, one of whom was buried and the other had disappeared almost immediately on the deposition of his partner.

The rich company of "The Stillwater" held up their heads and were honored of men. No one would dare to impute such an offense to them! It is possible DePew might have been guilty of such foolhardiness, but to impute without proving would have been weak and useless; and in examining into the matter he found the proving of his belief would be impossible.

"Wal," said Oliver, who, still disabled by his wounds, had become a regular member of DePew's family, "wal, jest let 'em slip. We has the mine. We'll soon be rich, an' dern 'em, as it turns out, they ain't got no good of it. Not even the satisfaction o' bein' honest!"

So they "let 'em slip." Meg was once more visited by the fashionables of the camp, while still admired by the rougher element that in her honor had worn golden pins.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SUCCESS."

WHAT magic success possesses! How it develops remarkable qualities! Making the world bow before abilities that without this wonderful aid would have been scoffed at—ignored. Let no man find glory in it, because of all things inexplicable it is the most. Hiding away from heroic effort, honesty, perseverance; and then often lighting where least deserved, and most unworthily used. Yet how delightful it is! How it gives the means of bringing happiness to those famishing for happiness!

How young, too, it makes one! How light of heart! At least so it made DePew and Meg. Her laugh rang out like sweetest music, her face shone with the light of her happy heart. For in their success she did not forget her friends. The woman with the children, who had left them at Rapid City, received a substantial remembrance, writing in return a letter saying that she had fared well, for as "women were scarce in these parts, the old man had come to time."

DePew wrote to Jake offering him a position with good pay, and to old Ned the driver with an inclosure large enough to supply him in "sperrits" for a year. They remembered every one, while the "Bullfinch" was yielding magnificently, making them rich, and giving old Oliver more money than he knew what to do with.

"I don't feel so bad about it as I used ter, Charley," he said with a chuckle, showing him the will that, when he recovered, he found still securely tied

between the pieces of tobacco, "I don't feel so bad over it 'cause it'll be all yours and young Ebenezer Oliver DePew's long arter I'm laid away."

The old man had told DePew how "orful proud he 'ud be o' a namesake." And so DePew had given the promise, that when the heir came the name should be his.

The young man made his appearance one fine morning, giving his father more pride than even his gold mine. And to his mother what only mothers ever feel.

Of all the world, though, old Oliver most exulted in young Eben. Up and down the floor he would pace, holding in his arms that soft warm bundle, limping slightly when, to silence a squall, he would actually trot.

There was nothing the old man would not do for this young one, who soon grew to know him, and coo to him in winning baby fashion. Months passed, the baby grew into a toddler, DePew became prominent in politics, and the mine, still yielding its golden harvest, was sold at high figures.

It was Meg's wish, which learning, Oliver seconded so warmly that at last DePew, convinced, yielded.

"We hez a million good, an' no derned bother. Better thet, than ter hev yer soul torn out by first this thing and t'other. Fer me, I hez took ter nussin', an' durn me ef it ain't a heap nicer. Eh, Eben? It beats minin' all holler!"

Whereat Eben, saying "Dit up, ole hoss," Oliver roared with delight, and then solemnly assured the boy's mother and father, "Thet this boy 'll be president o' the United States!"

When the mine was sold, DePew threw himself into politics and after a sharp fight and some fine speeches, was elected delegate to Congress. The papers spoke highly of his ability, men applauded his eloquence, his fame so spread, that it reached

his native city. Even great New York was proud to claim the successful western man as her son.

And sitting in his office, Charles M. DePew flushed with pride as he read of his nephew's good fortune. He had thought very often of this handsome nephew, had looked among his mail expecting almost hoping, there would come an appeal for help. Then he would have his triumph. Then he would settle that nephew. But no appeal came. No letter, since the announcement of his marriage. No news at all, until now in a western extract, the New York journals gave a synopsis of the life of "our brilliant orator and delegate, Charles DePew."

Charles M. DePew flushed with pride, and with pleasure too, when in the synopsis he read his own name, honorably mentioned.

"After all the young dog has some gratitude," he thought, not imagining that the pleasant allusion to the "distinguished uncle Charles M. DePew," was given solely and only at the desire and suggestion of Meg, who, having been such a poor thing as a copyist, the great lawyer still despised.

But Meg loving and tender, was potent with her husband. Dearer now than even on the day when for her sake DePew had cast aside his uncle's inheritance.

It was to please Meg, that her husband had made every effort to find Calamity Jane. Letters were sent to every camp directed to this remarkable young woman. But nothing was heard from her, nothing could be learned of her.

Madame Mustache was interviewed, but could give no information.

"I nevair haive seen hair, since ze night she play haire. Pairhaps she dead, pairhaps she run avay!" with a shrug of indifference. "Perhaps we will hear from her after many days, as this letter came from Jake," said DePew to his wife, holding up the letter

he had just received. It was mailed from one of the United States frontier garrisons.

"I have joined the army," it ran, "and am now regularly commissioned to kill the redskins. It has become a mania with me. If ever I outgrow it, I will visit you and Mrs. DePew, who are as present to my thoughts and dear to my remembrance, as if it were but yesterday that your kindness went out to a lonely man." Thus Jake wrote, and with this DePew had to be satisfied, though the scholarly hand and excellent wording of Jake's letter, made him more than ever desire his comradeship.

But he was too full of business and happiness to have time for regrets, for the successful man has many pleasures crowded upon him, many friends seeking him.

"It puzzles me though," he would say to Meg, with whom long ago he had exchanged the experiences of those eventful days, when she was the unconscious toast of Deadwood and he was chasing after the officer—"it puzzles me that I can not find or hear any thing of that pretty boy. Why, Meg, if it had not been for the loan of his horse, we might now be poverty stricken, old Oliver convicted of an attempt at wholesale murder, and all of us miserable. Talk of your Calamity Jane, who, love, much as I wish to think otherwise, is a most disreputable woman! She only played upon your sympathy, and kissed you. I'm not so sure I liked her kissing you, while this pretty little fellow was the real cause of all our good luck. Yet I can hear nothing of him. I have kept that advertisement in the paper since our Eben was born. But it seems to be useless."

It did seem useless, as well as the ride to Rapid City, where DePew had hoped to obtain some information from the saloon keeper.

"I've nothin' to tell yer, sir. Charley's not dead; I'm quite sure of that, and that's all I am sure of," the man said.

For himself, when DePew desired in some way to reward him for the opportune aid which had saved his life, the man laughed.

"Sometimes it is kinder nice to help a man," he said. "I don't care for any reward, sir, but if I do want help I'll call on you."

And so things remained. Deadwood advancing into a regular prosperous life, gave impetus to the territory. Ranches grew up about her, industries were established; all flourished, even the road agents, who still continued their daring robberies.

The name of the ringleader was generally known to be "Charley," but when Meg suggested that this "Charley" might be DePew's pretty boy of the desert, her husband laughed.

"Why, my girl, that was a child. At the utmost, he could not have been nineteen. He was no taller than you; I doubt if quite so tall. Oh, no, that boy was no criminal. He was, I've no doubt, some runaway student."

But even Meg's reminder of the road agent who had so politely rescued her could not induce her husband to associate the two.

"Wait," he said, "until we are east. I will, in the eastern journals, republish my advertisement, and we shall see this young fellow turn up, out of a country town. Then we can repay him his own, with interest."

The time for going east drew near, when DePew would start for Washington to represent the Territory of Dakota. He intended to do his best for her, to gain as much as possible, even her admission as a state, which now was earnestly desired and considerably agitated.

Prior to leaving his chosen home, he was acquainting himself with her other than mineral wealth; was traveling through her great valleys and visiting her magnificent farms; while Meg, with young Eben and old Oliver, awaited the head of their family, in

the pretty house into which their tiny one had blossomed.

They were counting the days for DePew's return, when the stage from Cheyenne brought the news of an attack of road agents that not only had been repulsed, but during which, it was currently believed, the leader had been wounded, perhaps killed.

"I swore to do it, and I did it," said the express messenger, who appeared to wear the laurels. "It war thet feller wi' the clipped ear," said Oliver, when giving Meg an account of the excitement over the defeat of the road agents.

He was still talking, the baby climbing over him, when their Chinese servant entered with a slip of paper, which he handed Meg. It had but one written line, but that turned Meg very pale, and made her say:

"I must start at once. Mr. Oliver, will you go for the buckboard, and take care of baby while I am away?"

"Sure I will. Don't-ee! don't-ee!" he said, trying to comfort her, until after another beseeching—

"Pray hurry the buckboard," he went, and hurried it to such purpose that Meg had not yet taken leave of her baby when he drove up to the door. With a kiss and whispered blessing, she put the child in Oliver's arms and handed him the slip of paper as she took her seat in the low buckboard, that, with its nice pair of ponies, was her especial property.

She had taken many drives in it, but never as now, with tearful eyes and trembling hands. It was well the ponies were gentle and easily guided, or they might not have trotted along so quietly, while old Oliver looked after their driver wondering:

"Ef I done right to let her go alone."

The young man in his arms soon settled the matter for him, keeping him so busy that he had barely a chance to read the line which Meg had given him.

"So she's foun'! Foun' at last, poor thing," he said, when he held up the bit of paper out of Eben's reach, on which in pencil were scrawled the words:

"I am dying. In Oliver's old cabin!!

"CALAMITY JANE."

CHAPTER XVII.

"IT IS BETTER SO."

UP the gulch Meg urged the horses, that, used to her gentle driving, must have marveled at her impatience.

"On, on," she cried, not seeing through her tears the workmen who stared at her, wondering what she was doing up the gulch at that hour alone. For the night was falling, the stars were shining out, and now a rich man's wife, Mrs. DePew's movements were of some interest.

She was thinking of another night over a year ago, when she had hurried to attend another who had been wounded.

Would this one live too? She prayed it. And as she remembered the slight, strong figure, full of life, she hoped it. But hope failed, when, where the road ended in the trail, a man met her. A stranger, who had evidently been awaiting her. "Hurry, or you'll be too late," he said, taking the reins from her hands.

She ran up the trail to the cabin, at whose door stood a bay horse so covered with foam that in the soft twilight he looked like one of the Indian ponies called "pinto."

He stood at the open door, not moving until a voice from the cabin called:

"Back, Desmond!"

It was a faint voice, but it was the voice of Calamity Jane, and made Meg's heart thrill.

"Jane!" She sprang in, passing the horse who seemed to wish to enter with her. "Jane!"

She called again, starting back, when on the floor

she saw, not the black-haired, dark-skinned Jane, but a curly-headed boy, whose face against the blue blanket on which he lay, was white as marble.

"O Meg!" He held his arms to her, "I am Jane, as you call me, Calamity, as I named myself. If you doubt it, look there. On the saddle you will find the wig and dye; even the skirts that gave me back my sex, when I fancied to change from the boy I pleased to be. Ha! ha!" Her laugh ended with a swoon, and the curly head fell back.

Was he dead! Meg shuddered and came forward to help him. She could not feel that this was her Jane. This, the woman on whose breast she had wept—whose arms had upheld her.

But when the blue eyes opened and looked full at her with that tenderness which had so affected her, when the faint voice whispered, "Hold me in your arms thus, Meg, and kiss me; the dying can not injure," somehow the tenderness came back to her which this strange creature had from the first excited.

As she moved to look into Meg's face, the unbuttoned jacket showed her bloody shirt.

"Let me see to your wounds," Meg begged. "Mr. Oliver's life was saved. Yours may be. Let me see to them."

"No, no," said Calamity; "it is better so," and then a thought came to her. "Look!" she herself pulled open the linen, and baring a woman's beautiful body, said as she showed the gaping side: "Unto death! Don't you see? Unto death!"

She rested a moment, her hands falling down as she whispered, "Cover me. Keep the secret of my sex. It—it—" with a faint shadow of her wild humor, "was a caprice of mine to disown it."

Meg gently covered her, while her own tears fell in pity. There was stillness in the cabin, the lantern on the wooden table throwing its light upon the pretty face resting on Meg's arm.

Presently Calamity opened her eyes. "I was dreaming," she said. "Dreaming that I grew well and shared your home!"

"I wish you could," was Meg's fervent answer,

"Sweet soul," the other murmured, "Sweet soul!"

She dozed again. Starting from it in excitement, "You ask no question!" she said. "Hold upon your breast a disguised woman, a road agent, a faro-player, a criminal, and yet ask no questions!" She laughed, and the laughter brought back pain. But yet she talked on, Meg catching the low words: "Faith, Hope, and Charity. The greatest of these, Charity!"

Somehow this Bible phrase brought back to pious Meg a religious obligation.

"Jane," she said, "let me send for a priest. There is a man outside!"

"Send him! They will send him to the penitentiary. Quick! Call him here! He must be off! He risks his life! I — ha! ha! I am past *their* hurting."

The man must have been near, for as Calamity spoke he came in the room.

"Charley! Charley!" he sobbed. "What do I care. If you must die, I'd as leave be taken." He held Charley's hand in his as one man holds another's. "Oh, ma'am, if he'd not been so willful, he might have been saved. But when he was wounded and in my arms, I dragged him off, he made me mount Desmond and bring him here to see you; and now he's bled to death."

"Pshaw, man," said Calamity, "death must come. I'd rather have it so, with a friend like you beside me, and a lady to pray over me, than to drag out my days in prison, or in tedious life. Ah! but we lived bravely. What fun we've had together, boy. It was jolly while it lasted."

Speaking, Calamity had raised herself, leaning against Meg's shoulder. She grew stronger, or

seemed thus to grow, as she tried to rouse the despondent man. Failing in this she cried out, "Oh save yourself. I want to die in peace, and can not unless I know you are safe. Stir up, old fellow. Mount Desmond and fly."

Still the man knelt at her side, sobbing over the hand he held.

"Meg." Calamity turned her eyes upon her. "Once a boy named Charley helped your husband when he needed help. If he will return that favor, let him send money to James Smythe, Ontario, Canada."

"It shall be done. Sufficient to keep him for life," Meg answered solemnly.

"There, James. Do you hear. Quick, go! If you love me, go. You have enough to take you there. Lead an honest life there, James. It is tedious, but safer. Go, if you would have me die in peace."

They gripped hands, parted, and then at the door with a sob the man ran back.

"Charley, Charley, must I go?"

And as Calamity faintly whispered, "Go, if you love me, and take care of Desmond," the man gripped her hands again, kissed her cheek, and whispering to Meg:

"Ma'am, stay with him. He's dearer than my life. The only pard I could ever trust," broke sobbing from the room.

There was a struggle at the door, for the horse could not be forced away. But after Calamity's faint "Go, I say," he let himself be mounted, and in the stillness there came back the sound of his flying hoofs. Fainter and fainter the sounds came and then ceased. Looking at Calamity, Meg saw two tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Ah," she moaned, "I loved that horse and he loved me. If there is eternity for me why not for him, who has man's noblest parts?"

"Eternity! O Calamity," Meg implored, "prepare for it. Repent your sins."

"My sins!" Calamity faintly laughed, then moaned, then rested silent, and then again opening her eyes, said: "Hold me on your breast, I will repent what sins I can. I can not repent stage robbing, for I robbed no one who seemed poor. Then I was better than speculators. It seemed to me I was but equalizing matters. No, I took from the rich only, and always gave to the poor. I kept none of it. I own nothing but that horse. Ah, but the excitement. It was fine, Meg, fine." Dying, as she was, the memory of it brightened her face and awakened her faint laugh, which brought back her pain.

She had longer suffering this time and more severe, for the sweat broke out around her mouth. Softly Meg wiped it away, fervently she prayed for her who would not pray for herself. And presently, still resting in her arms, Calamity fell asleep.

The night passed, dawn came, the sun shining in the cabin awakened the dying girl. "It is near the end," she whispered. "Oh! Meg I have been much injured. It was despair that drove me to make a jest of my womanhood. Now, dying, I yet feel the bitterness of my wrong. But I forgave my wronger. You asked me to pray, to prepare for eternity. I will! O God, I pray to be forgiven as I *have* forgiven." She clasped her hands, her eyes looked out upon the glowing sky of morning and gradually over them came the film of death. Whatever her injuries, whatever her wrongs, she carried them with her into the silence of that last sleep.

Meg was still praying beside her when her husband came to the door.

"Meg! love!" he softly called her, starting as she moved aside, and he looked down on the dead face of the boy who had once aided him.

"Charley dead!" he exclaimed.

Then in the presence of that still form Meg told him what she knew, and his words were the same that Calamity had spoken :

" It is better so ! "

They buried her quietly ; no one but themselves knowing that in the grave marked " Jane ——, Dec. 1st, 1878," lay the road agent Charley, whose feats had been the wonder of the boldest.

But they did not forget her, Meg besieging heaven with prayers for her soul, and DePew wondering what circumstances could have led so bright and spirited a creature into such a life. Even in Washington's business and gayety they remembered her, where their wealth made them welcome. Where it even made the fashionables of that great center amiably laugh over the Millionaire Oliver's eccentricity. This wealth might have obtained him a pretty young wife, for plenty of money finds out many a willing bride, but Oliver held to young Eben, " He's enough for me," he said.

It was a wonderful charm, wealth. It actually made Charles M. DePew not only visit Washington and call on his nephew's wife, but now that they needed nothing, induced him to entertain them in New York.

" I told you long ago, Meg, he had no feeling. That pride and obstinacy were his strong points," DePew said to his wife, while to please her he made ready for the grand dinner his uncle was giving in their honor. " Even if this be true, dear," answered Meg, " let us be in peace with all."

And then as he kissed her, called her the " prettiest girl in town," she coaxed :

"And, love, you will make yourself pleasant to your uncle. You will invite him to visit us in Deadwood. We must overlook defects and be kindly to all. Is it not better so ? "

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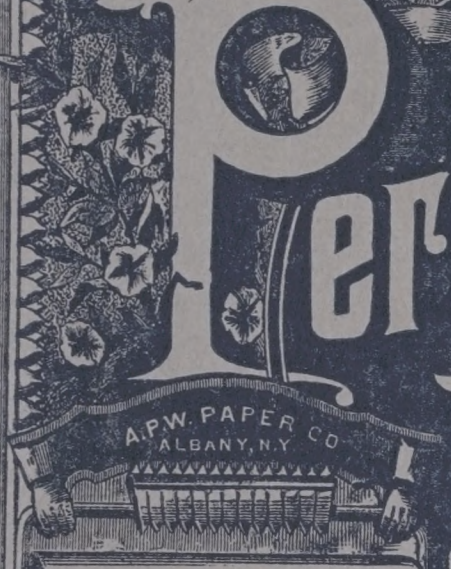

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